



# **The Kung Fu Fandom Guide to Classic Kung Fu Cinema**

**Compiled by  
Blake Dennis Matthews**



*For all the hundreds, if not thousands, of fans of old school martial arts cinema who still prefer their shapes, their bashers techniques, their hidden trampolines and reverse projection in favor of all the CGI that money can buy.*



This work is a compilation of reviews of old school kung fu movies hailing from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, South Korea, and in some cases, the West. It was not made with the intention of making a profit, but as a personal database of film reviews in the classic "Leonard Maltin style" and as a means to preserve the writings of many internet fansites and fanpages that have since stopped updating for one reason or another.

At least half of the reviews included in this volume have been culled from the Kung Fu Fandom Forum, and represents the blood, sweat, and tears of dozens of forum members, many of whom no longer actively post today.

The other half of the reviews have been taken from different websites, some of which have been taken down, others of which are no longer updated, and a handful of which are still active. These include:

- Wasted Life
- Teleport City
- View from the Brooklyn Bridge
- Shaolin Chamber
- Bad Movies dot Org
- Hong Kong Movie Database
- Internet Movie Database
- Brucesploitation
- City on Fire
- The Spinning Image
- 1000 Misspent Hours and Counting
- Hong Kong Film Net
- So Good Reviews
- Monsters At Play
- Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films
- Cold Fusion Video
- A Beautiful Film Worth Fighting For
- Far East Films

Most of the reviews have been reformatted to fit a specific template. As the reviews have been drawn from diverse sources, the lengths, quantity of spoilers, and information about the films may differ from one movie to another. Some favorites may have an entry lasting only a single paragraph, while other more obscure movies may have a review lasting two pages or more.

It should also be noted that not all opinions stated in the selected reviews will reflect the opinions of the other contributors and reviewers in this work.

Just to reiterate, despite my not citing specific who wrote what review, the original intent of this compilation was to provide myself with a database of reviews for as many old school movies as possible. I'm sharing it with others for the benefit of all.

- Blake Matthews

1. Ace of swordsman
2. Adventure at Shaolin
3. Adventure for Imperial Treasure
4. Against the Drunken Cat's Paw
5. All Men Are Brothers
6. Ambitious Kung Fu Girl
7. Amsterdam Connection
8. Angry Guest
9. Angry Hero
10. Angry River
11. Angry Tiger
12. Angry Young Man
13. Anonymous Heroes
14. Arhats in Fury
15. Art of War by Sun Tzu
16. Assassin
17. Assassinator
18. Assault of Final Rival
19. Association
20. Attack of the Joyful Goddess
21. Avenging Eagle
22. Avenging Sword
23. Awaken Punch
24. Back Alley Princes
25. Bandits from Shantung
26. Bastard
27. Battle Wizard
28. Beach of the War Gods
29. Beautiful Swordsman
30. Beauty Escort
31. Bells of Death
32. Best of Shaolin Kung Fu
33. Betrayal and Revenge
34. Big Boss
35. Big Boss of Shanghai
36. Big Boss Part 2
37. Big Boss II
38. Big Family
39. Big Fight
40. Big Rascal
41. Black and White Umbrella
42. Black Belt
43. Black Belt Karate
44. Black Butterfly
45. Black Dragon's Revenge
46. Black Enforcer
47. Black Justice
48. Black Society
49. Black Tavern
50. Blazing Temple
51. Blind Boxer
52. Blind Fist of Bruce
53. Blood Brothers
54. Blood and Guts
55. Blood Child
56. Blood of Dragon Peril
57. Blood of the Leopard
58. Blooded Treasury Fight
59. Bloody Escape
60. Bloody Hero
61. Bloody Mask of Karate
62. Bold Three
63. Bone-Crushing Kid
64. Born Invincible
65. Boxer from Shantung
66. Boxer from the Temple
67. Boxer Rebellion
68. Boxer's Adventure
69. Boxer's Omen
70. Brave and the Evil
71. Brave Archer, Part 1
72. Brave Archer 3
73. Bravest Fist
74. Bravest Revenge
75. Breakout from Oppression
76. Broken Oath
77. Bronze Head and Steel Arm
78. Brotherhood of Heroes
79. Bruce and Dragon Fist
80. Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu
81. Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu Part 2
82. Bruce and the Iron Finger
83. Bruce and the Shaolin Bronzemen
84. Bruce, King of Kung Fu
85. Bruce, Kung Fu Girls
86. Bruce Lee's Greatest Revenge
87. Bruce Lee: A Dragon Story
88. Bruce Lee Against Supermen
89. Bruce Lee and I
90. Bruce Lee Fights Back from the Grave
91. Bruce Lee, Superstar
92. Bruce Lee, the Invincible
93. Bruce Lee – The True Story
94. Bruce Lee, We Miss You
95. Bruce Lee in New Guinea
96. Bruce Strikes Back
97. Bruce Takes Dragon Town
98. Bruce the Superhero
99. Bruce Tuan – 7 Promises
100. Bruce vs. Bill
101. Bruce's Deadly Fingers
102. Bruce's Fist of Vengeance
103. Brutal Boxer
104. Brutal Sorcery
105. Buddha Assassinator
106. Buddha's Palm
107. Buddhist Fist
108. Buddhist Fist and Tiger's Claws
109. Butterfly 18
110. By Hook or by Crook
111. Calamity of Snakes
112. Call Him Mr. Shatter
113. Cannibals
114. Canton Viper
115. Canton Iron Kung Fu
116. Casino
117. Cat vs. Rat
118. Cavalier
119. Centipede Horror
120. Challenge of Death

121. Challenge of the Lady Ninja
122. Challenge of the Gamblers
123. Challenge of the Masters
124. Challenge of the Tiger
125. Challenge the Dragon
126. Challenger
127. Champ Against Champ
128. Champion of the Boxers
129. Champions
130. Chase
131. Chase Step by Step
132. Cheeky Chap
133. Child of Peach
134. Chinatown Kid
135. Chinese Boxer
136. Chinese Godfather
137. Chinese Kung Fu Against Godfather
138. Chinese Puzzle for a Judo Fighter
139. Chinese Stuntman
140. Chivalrous Inn
141. Chivalry Deadly Feud
142. Chivalry, the Gunman and the Killer
143. Choy Li Fat Kung Fu
144. Chu Liu Xiang and the Finger Flicking Skill
145. City Called Dragon
146. Clan Feuds
147. Clan of the White Lotus
148. Clones of Bruce Lee
149. Club
150. Cold Wind Hands
151. Come Drink with Me
152. Comet Strikes
153. Conspiracy of Thieves
154. Crane Fighter
155. Crazy Acrobat
156. Crazy Guy With Super Kung Fu
157. Crazy Horse, Intelligent Monkey
158. Crazy Shaolin Disciples
159. Crippled Avengers
160. Crippled Masters
161. Crush
162. Crystal Fist
163. Cub Tiger from Kwangtung
164. Damned
165. Dance of Death
166. Dance of the Drunk Mantis
167. Dark Lady of Kung Fu
168. Darkest Sword
169. Dead and the Deadly
170. Deadly Angels
171. Deadly Breaking Sword
172. Deadly China Doll
173. Deadly Confrontation
174. Deadly Duo
175. Deadly Knives
176. Deadly Secret
177. Deadly Silver Spear
178. Deadly Strike
179. Deaf Mute Heroine
180. Death Cage
181. Death Duel
182. Death Duel of Kung Fu
183. Death Duel of Mantis
184. Death on the Docks
185. Death Ring
186. Delightful Forest
187. Demon Strike
188. Desperate Chase
189. Desperate Killer
190. Devil and Angel
191. Devil Killer
192. Devil's Mirror
193. Devil's Treasure
194. Dirty Kung Fu
195. Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog
196. Disciples of Shaolin Temple
197. Disciples of Shaolin
198. Disciple of the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber
199. Dog King and Snake King
200. Double Crossers
201. Dragon Creek
202. Dragon Fist
203. Dragon Force
204. Dragon Fortress
205. Dragon Fury
206. Dragon Gate Inn
207. Dragon Lives Again
208. Dragon Lord
209. Dragon Missile
210. Dragon on the Shaolin Tower
211. Dragon Squad
212. Dragon Swamp
213. Dragon, the Hero
214. Dragon, the Lizard and the Boxer
215. Dragon, the Young Hero
216. Dragon's Blood
217. Dragon's Claw
218. Dragon's Infernal Showdown
219. Dragon's Snake Fist
220. Dreadnaught
221. Dream Sword
222. Drunken Arts and Crippled Fist
223. Drunken Master
224. Drunken Master, Slippery Snake
225. Drunken Master Strikes Back
226. Drunken Tai Chi
227. Dual Flying Kicks
228. Duel
229. Duel at Black Dunes
230. Duel at the Supreme Gate
231. Duel at Tiger Village
232. Duel for Gold
233. Duel of Fists
234. Duel of Karate
235. Duel of the Masters
236. Duel of the 7 Tigers
237. Duel of the Tough
238. Duel of the Ultimate Weapons
239. Duel to the Death
240. Duel with Samurai
241. Duel with the Devil
242. Duel with the Devils
243. Dynamite Shaolin Heroes
244. Dynamite Trio

245. Dynamo
246. Dynasty
247. Eagle vs. Silver Fox
248. Eagle's Claw
249. Eagle's Claws
250. Eagle's Killer
251. Edge of Fury
252. Eight Diagram Cudgel
253. Eight Diagram Lotus Palm
254. Eight Diagram Pole Fighter
255. Eight Dragon Swords
256. Eight Escorts
257. 8 Masters
258. 8 Strikes of the Wildcat
259. 18 Bronzegirls of Shaolin
260. 18 Bronzemen
261. 18 Fatal Strikes
262. Eighteen Jade Arhats
263. 18 Swirling Riders
264. Emperor and his Brother
265. Enchantress
266. Encounter of the Spooky Kind
267. End of the Wicked Tigers
268. Enter the Dragon
269. Enter the Fat Dragon
270. Enter the Game of Death
271. Enter the Invincible Hero
272. Enter the Panther
273. Enter Three Dragons
274. Escape
275. Evidence
276. Evil Hits Evil
277. Excelsior
278. Executioners of Shaolin
279. Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger
280. Face Behind the Mask
281. Fantasy Mission Force
282. Fatal Flying Guillotines
283. Fatal Needles vs Fatal Fists
284. Fate of Lee Khan
285. Fearless Duo
286. Fearless Fighters
287. Fearless Hyena
288. Fearless Young Boxer
289. Female Chivalry
290. Female Fugitive
291. Fierce Fist
292. Fight Among the Supers
293. Fight for Shaolin Tamo Mystique
294. Fighting Ace
295. Fighting Fists of Shanghai Joe
296. Fighting Fool
297. Fighting of Shaolin Monk
298. Filthy Guy
299. Fingers that Kill
300. Fist of Dragon
301. Fist of Fury 2
302. Fist of Fury III
303. Fist that Kills
304. Fist to Fist
305. Fistful of Talons
306. Fists and Guts
307. Fists, Kicks and Evil
308. Fists of Bruce Lee
309. Five Deadly Venoms
310. Five Element Ninjas
311. Five Fighters from Shaolin
312. Five Pattern Dragon Claws
313. Five Shaolin Masters
314. Five Venoms vs. Wu Tang
315. Flag of Iron
316. Flash Future Kung Fu
317. Fly Dragon Mountain
318. Flying Dagger
319. Flying Guillotine
320. Flying Guillotine 2
321. Flying Killer
322. Flying Over Grass
323. Flying Swallow
324. Forbidden Killing
325. Four Hands of Death
326. Four Invincible
327. Four Riders
328. Four Shaolin Challengers
329. 14 Amazons
330. Friends
331. From the Highway
332. Fugitive
333. Furious
334. Furious Dragon
335. Furious Slaughter
336. Fury of King Boxer
337. Gabling for Head
338. Game of Death
339. Gang Master
340. General Stone
341. Ghost Hill
342. Ghostly Face
343. Ghosts Galore
344. Girl Called Tigress
345. Girl Fighter
346. Godfather Squad
347. Gold Hunters
348. Golden Dart Hero
349. Golden Destroyers
350. Golden Knight
351. Golden Lion
352. Golden Mask
353. Golden Sabre
354. Golden Swallow
355. Golden Sword
356. Golden Triangle
357. Goose Boxer
358. Grandmaster of Death
359. Grandmaster of Shaolin Kung Fu
360. Great Conspiracy
361. Great Hunter
362. Greatest Thai Boxing
363. Green Dragon Inn
364. Green Jade Statuette
365. Guy with Secret Kung Fu
366. Half a Loaf of Kung Fu
367. Handcuff
368. Hands of Death

369. Hapkido
370. Hard as a Dragon
371. Hard Bastard
372. Hard Man with Guts
373. Have Sword, Will Travel
374. He Has Nothing But Kung Fu
375. He Walks like a Tiger
376. Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre
377. Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre Part 2
378. Heinous Fiend
379. Hell's Wind Staff
380. Hero of the Heroes
381. Hero of the Time
382. Hero of the Waterfront
383. Hero Tattooed with Nine Dragons
384. Heroes of Sung
385. Heroes of the Wild
386. Heroes of the East
387. Heroes of the Late Ming Dynasty
388. Heroes Two
389. Heroic Ones
390. Heroine
391. Heroine Kan Lien Chu
392. Heroine of Tribulation
393. Heroine Susan, The Sister of the Shantung Boxer
394. Hidden Hero
395. Hidden Power of Dragon Sabre
396. Himalayan
397. Hitman in the Hand of Buddha
398. Hocus Pocus
399. Holy Robe of Shaolin Temple
400. Horse Boxing Killer
401. Hot, the Cool, and the Vicious
402. Human Lanterns
403. Hurricane
404. I Will Finally Knock You Down, Dad
405. I'll Get You One Day
406. Ill Wind
407. Image of Bruce Lee
408. Immortal Warriors
409. Imperial Sword
410. Imperial Sword, Crouching Devil
411. Imposter
412. Imprudent Iron Phoenix
413. In the Beginning
414. Incredible Kung Fu Master
415. Incredible Kung Fu Mission
416. Incredible Shaolin Thunderkick
417. Infernal Street
418. Inheritor of Kung Fu
419. Instant Kung Fu Man
420. Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan
421. Invincible
422. Invincible Armour
423. Invincible Eight
424. Invincible Enforcer
425. Invincible Fist
426. Invincible Kung Fu
427. Invincible Kung Fu Trio
428. Invincible Obsessed Fighter
429. Invincible Shaolin
430. Invincible Super Chan
431. Invincible Super Guy
432. Invisible Terrorist
433. Iron Dragon Strikes Back
434. Iron-Fisted Eagle's Claws
435. Iron Fisted Monk
436. Iron Man (aka Chinese Iron Man)
437. Iron Man (aka A Dollar a Fist)
438. Iron Mistress
439. Iron Monkey
440. Iron Neck Li
441. Iron Ox
442. Iron Swallow
443. Jackie and Bruce to the Rescue
444. Jade Bow
445. Jade Dragon
446. Jade-Faced Assassin
447. Jade Fox
448. Jade Tiger
449. Journey of the Doomed
450. Judgment of an Assassin
451. Judicial Sword
452. Karate Story
453. Kid from Kwantung
454. Kid with the Golden Arm
455. Kidnap in Rome
456. Killer
457. Killer Army
458. Killer Clans
459. Killer Constable
460. Killer Darts
461. Killer from Above
462. Killer Meteors
463. Killing Sword
464. King Boxer
465. King Eagle
466. King of Fists and Dollars
467. Kings of Blade and Sword
468. Knife of Devil's Roaring and Souls Missing
469. Knight Errant
470. Knockabout
471. Kung Fu Arts
472. Kung Fu Brothers in the Wild West
473. Kung Fu Emperor
474. Kung Fu from Beyond the Grave
475. Kung Fu Genius
476. Kung Fu Girl
477. Kung Fu Girls
478. Kung Fu Instructor
479. Kung Fu Kid
480. Kung Fu Kids Break Away
481. Kung Fu Master Named Drunk Cat
482. Kung Fu of 8 Drunkards
483. Kung Fu vs. Yoga
484. Lackey and the Lady Tiger
485. Lady Assassin
486. Lady Constables
487. Lady Hermit
488. Lady is the Boss
489. Lady Karate
490. Lady Professional
491. Lady Snake Fist
492. Lady Whirlwind



493. Lady Whirlwind and the Rangers
494. Lady with a Sword
495. Lama Avengers
496. Last Fist of Fury
497. Last Hurrah for Chivalry
498. Last Strike
499. Leg Fighters
500. Legend of a Fighter
501. Legend of the Fox
502. Legend of the Owl
503. Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires
504. Legendary Strike
505. Legendary Weapons of China
506. Leopard Fist Ninja
507. Life Gamble
508. Life of Ninja
509. Lion vs. Lion
510. Little Hero
511. Little Hero of Shaolin Temple
512. Little Mad Guy
513. Little Superman
514. Living Sword
515. Lizard
516. Long Road to Gallantry
517. Loot
518. Lost Kung Fu Secrets
519. Lost Swordship
520. Lotus Camp
521. Lust for Love of a Chinese Courtesan
522. Mad Cold-Blooded Murder
523. Mad Killer
524. Mad Monkey Kung Fu
525. Mafia vs. Ninja
526. Magic Beggar
527. Magic Blade
528. Magic of Spell
529. Magic Warriors
530. Magnificent
531. Magnificent Bodyguards
532. Magnificent Butcher
533. Magnificent Chivalry
534. Magnificent Ruffians
535. Magnificent Swordsman
536. Magnificent Trio
537. Magnificent Wonderman
538. Magnum Fist
539. Man Called Tiger
540. Man from Hong Kong
541. Mantis Fist and Tiger Claws of Shaolin
542. Mantis Under Falcon Claws
543. Marco Polo
544. Mar's Villa
545. Marshes of Liang Shan Po
546. Martial Arts
547. Martial Arts of Shaolin
548. Martial Club
549. Martial Hero
550. Martial Monks of Shaolin Temple
551. Marvelous Stunts of Kung Fu
552. Mask Heroine
553. Masked Avengers
554. Massacre Survivor
555. Master and the Kid
556. Master Killers
557. Master of Kung Fu
558. Master Strikes
559. Master Strikes Back
560. Master with Cracked Fingers
561. Matching Escort
562. Mean Streets of Kung Fu
563. Men from the Gutter
564. Men from the Monastery
565. Middle Kingdom Mark of Blood
566. Mighty Couple
567. Mighty Four
568. Mighty One
569. Ming Patriots
570. Miracle Fighters
571. Miraculous Flower
572. Mission for the Dragon
573. Mission Kiss and Kill
574. Monkey Fist
575. Monkey Fist, Floating Snake
576. Monkey Wife
577. Monk's Fight
578. Moon Night Cutter
579. Moonlight Sword and Jade Lion
580. Murky Shadows Over the Gorges
581. My Blade, My Life
582. My Kung Fu 12 Kicks
583. My Life's on the Line
584. My Name Called Bruce
585. My Rebellious Son
586. My Young Auntie
587. Mysterious Heroes
588. Mysterious Knight
589. Mystery of Chess Boxing
590. Na Cha and the Seven Devils
591. Na Cha the Great
592. Naval Commandos
593. New Fist of Fury
594. New Game of Death
595. New One-Armed Swordsman
596. New Pilgrims to the West
597. Nine Demons
598. 99 Cycling Swords
599. Ninja Avenger
600. Ninja Holocaust
601. Ninja Hunter
602. Ninja in Ancient China
603. Ninja in the Claws of the CIA
604. Ninja in the Deadly Trap
605. Ninja in the Dragon's Den
606. Ninja Over the Great Wall
607. Ninja: The Final Duel
608. Ninja vs. Bruce Lee
609. Ninja vs. the Shaolin Guards
610. None but the Brave
611. Notorious Eight
612. Oath of Death
613. Odd Couple
614. Ode to Gallantry
615. Of Cooks and Kung Fu
616. One the Verge of Death

617. One-Armed Boxer
618. One-Armed Swordsman
619. One-Armed Swordsman Against the 9 Killers
620. One-Armed Swordsmen
621. One Foot Crane
622. One-Legged Fiend
623. Opium and the Kung Fu Master
624. Out of Danger
625. Pai Yu Ching
626. Paris Killers
627. Payment in Blood
628. Pearl in Command
629. Peculiar Boxing Tricks and the Master
630. Phantom Kung Fu
631. Phantom Lute
632. Pier
633. Pirate
634. Point the Finger of Death
635. Police Force
636. Postman Strikes Back
637. Pretended Rebel
638. Princess Fragrance
639. Prodigal Boxer
640. Prodigal Son
641. Professional Killer
642. Protectors
643. Proud Horse in Flying Sand
644. Proud Twins
645. Purple Darts
646. Pursuit
647. Queen Boxer
648. Queen of Fist
649. Queen's Ransom
650. Rage of the Wind
651. Raging Master's Tiger Crane
652. Raiders of the Shaolin Temple
653. Raiders of Yunkang Caves
654. Rattling Whip
655. Raw Courage
656. Rebel of Shaolin
657. Rebellious Reign
658. Red Phoenix
659. Redress
660. Renegade Master
661. Return of Bruce
662. Return of Shanghai Joe
663. Return of the Chinese Boxer
664. Return of the Deadly Blade
665. Return of the 18 Bronzemen
666. Return of the Hero of the Waterfront
667. Return of the Kung Fu Dragon
668. Return of the One-Armed Swordsman
669. Return of the Red Tiger
670. Return of the Tiger
671. Return Single-Legged Man
672. Revenge is Sweet
673. Revenge of the Drunken Master
674. Revenge of the Iron Fist Maiden
675. Revenge of the Kung Fu Mao
676. Revenge of the Lady Fighter
677. Revenge of the Shaolin Kid
678. Revenge of the Shaolin Master
679. Revengeful Swordswoman
680. Revenge Superlady
681. Revenger
682. Rider of Revenge
683. Righteous Fist
684. Rikisha Kuri
685. Ring of Death
686. Ringing Sword
687. Rivals of Kung Fu
688. Rivals of the Silver Fox
689. River of Fury
690. Robin Hood, Arrows, Beans and Karate
691. Romance of Book & Sword
692. Royal Fist
693. Ruthless Revenge
694. Savage Five
695. Saviour Monk
696. Scholar Swordsman
697. Scorching Sun, Fierce Winds, Wild Fire
698. Screaming Tiger
699. Sea God and Ghosts
700. Seaman No. 7
701. Secret Executioners
702. Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger
703. Secret of Chinese Kung Fu
704. Secret of Shaolin Poles
705. Secret Rivals
706. Secret Rivals 2
707. Secret Rivals 3
708. Secret Service of the Imperial Court
709. Secret Shaolin Kung Fu
710. 7 Commandments of Kung Fu
711. 7 Finger Kung Fu
712. 7 Grandmasters
713. 7-Man Army
714. Seven Men of Kung Fu
715. 7-Star Grand Mantis
716. Seven Steps of Kung Fu
717. Seven to One
718. Shadow Boxer
719. Shadow Ninja
720. Shadow Whip
721. Shanghai Lil and the Sunluck Kid
722. Shaolin Avengers
723. Shaolin Boxers
724. Shaolin Brothers
725. Shaolin Chastity Kung Fu
726. Shaolin Daredevils
727. Shaolin Deadly Kicks
728. Shaolin Devil, Shaolin Angel
729. Shaolin Disciple
730. Shaolin Dolemite
731. Shaolin Drunk Fighter
732. Shaolin Drunk Monk
733. Shaolin Ex Monk
734. Shaolin Handlock
735. Shaolin Hero
736. Shaolin Intruders
737. Shaolin Invincible Guys
738. Shaolin Invincible Sticks
739. Shaolin Invincibles
740. Shaolin Iron Claws

741. Shaolin Kids
742. Shaolin King Boxer
743. Shaolin Kung Fu
744. Shaolin Kung Fu Master
745. Shaolin Kung Fu Mystagogue
746. Shaolin Legend
747. Shaolin Mantis
748. Shaolin Martial Arts
749. Shaolin Plot
750. Shaolin Prince
751. Shaolin Red Master
752. Shaolin Swallow
753. Shaolin Temple (1976)
754. Shaolin Temple (1976)
755. Shaolin Temple (1982)
756. Shaolin Temple 2: Kids from Shaolin
757. Shaolin Temple Against Lama
758. Shaolin Temple Strikes Back
759. Shaolin: The Blood Mission
760. Shaolin vs. Lama
761. Shaolin vs. Ninja
762. Shaolin vs. Tai Chi
763. Shaolin Wooden Men
764. She'd Hate Rather Than Love
765. Showdown at Cotton Mill
766. Showdown at the Equator
767. Silver Maid
768. Silver Knife, Scarlet Blade
769. Six Assassins
770. Six Directions Boxing
771. Six Intellectuals
772. Skyhawk
773. Sleeping Fist
774. Slice of Death
775. Smugglers
776. Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin
777. Snake-Crane Secret
778. Snake Deadly Act
779. Snake in the Eagle's Shadow
780. Snake in the Monkey's Shadow
781. Snake Prince
782. Snake Shadow Lama Fist
783. Snake Strikes Back
784. Snaky Fight Against Mantis
785. Son of the Swordsman
786. Souls of the Sword
787. South Shaolin Master
788. South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin
789. Spiritual Boxer
790. Spiritual Boxer 2
791. Spiritual Kung Fu
792. Spy in the Palace
793. Star, the Rogue and the Kung Fu Kid
794. Stoner
795. Stormy Sun
796. Story in the Temple of Red Lily
797. Story of 36 Killers
798. Story of the Dragon
799. Story of the Drunken Master
800. Story of Thirty-Six Killers
801. Story of Wong Fei-Hung: Part One
802. Stranger and the Gunfighter
803. Stranger from Canton
804. Stranger from Shaolin
805. Strife for Mastery
806. Struggle Karate
807. Struggle through Death
808. Sun Dragon
809. Sunset in the Forbidden City
810. Super Dragon
811. Super Gang
812. Super Power
813. Supergirl of Kung Fu
814. Supermen Against the Orient
815. Superior Darter
816. Supreme Sword
817. Survival of a Dragon
818. Swift Shaolin Boxer
819. Sword (1971)
820. Sword (1980)
821. Sword Named Revenge
822. Sword of Justice
823. Sword Stained with Royal Blood
824. Swordsman of all Swordsmen
825. Swordsmates
826. Sworn Chivalries
827. Tai Chi Chun
828. Taoism Drunkard
829. Taste of Cold Steel
830. Tattoo Connection
831. Tattooed Dragon
832. Temptation
833. Ten Brothers of Shaolin
834. 10 Magnificent Killers
835. Ten Tigers of Kwantung
836. Ten Tigers of Shaolin
837. That Fiery Girl
838. 13 Styles Strike
839. 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber of Shaolin
840. 36 Crazy Fists
841. 36 Deadly Styles
842. Thirty-Six Sword Guards
843. 37 Plots of Kung Fu
844. Thou Shalt Not Kill...But Once
845. Thousand Mile Escort
846. Three Evil Masters
847. Three Famous Constables
848. Thunderbolt
849. Thunderbolt Fist
850. Thundering Mantis
851. Thundering Sword
852. Tiger and Crane Fists
853. Tiger at Top
854. Tiger Force
855. Tiger from Hong Kong
856. Tiger Jungle
857. Tiger Love
858. Tiger of Northland
859. Tiger on the River Kwai
860. Tiger Over Wall
861. Tiger Tiger Tiger
862. Tiger vs Dragon
863. Tigress is Coming
864. Tigresses

865. To Crack the Dragon Gate  
866. To Kill a Jaguar  
867. To Kill a Mastermind  
868. To Kill with Intrigue  
869. Tornado of Pearl River  
870. Touch of Zen  
871. Tormentor  
872. Toughest Guy  
873. Tournament  
874. Triumph of Two Kung Fu Arts  
875. Trail of the Broken Blade  
876. Traitorous  
877. Treasure of Bruce Le  
878. Triangular Duel  
879. Trilogy of Swordsmanship  
880. True Game of Death  
881. Trust and Brotherhood  
882. Twelve Deadly Coins  
883. Two Cavaliers  
884. Two Champions of Shaolin  
885. Two Crippled Heroes  
886. Two Fists Against the Law  
887. Two Great Cavaliers  
888. Two Heroes Shooting Stars  
889. Two Toothless Tigers  
890. Two Wondrous Tigers  
891. Unbeaten 28  
892. Undefeated Sword  
893. Valiant Ones  
894. Valley of the Double Dragon  
895. Vengeance  
896. Vengeance is a Golden Blade  
897. Vengeance of a Snow Girl  
898. Vengeful Beauty

899. Victim  
900. Wandering Dragon  
901. War of Shaolin Temple  
902. Warrior from Shaolin  
903. Warriors Two  
904. Water Margin  
905. Way of the Dragon  
906. Ways of Kung Fu  
907. We Are Going to Eat You  
908. Web Death  
909. When Tae Kwon Do Strikes  
910. Whiplash  
911. White Butterfly Killer  
912. Wild Panther  
913. Win Them All  
914. Winged Tiger  
915. Witch Sword  
916. Wolf Devil Woman  
917. Woman Avenger  
918. Writing Kung Fu  
919. Yellow-Faced Tiger  
920. Yoga and the Kung Fu Girl  
921. Young Avenger  
922. Young Dragons  
923. Young Hero  
924. Young Hero of Shaolin (1975)  
925. Young Hero of Shaolin (1984)  
926. Young Hero of Shaolin, Part 2  
927. Young Master  
928. Young Taoism Fighter  
929. Young Vagabond  
930. Zen Kwan Do Strikes in Paris  
931. Zen Master 6  
932. Zodiac Fighters



**Ace of Swordsman (Taiwan, 1969: Lin Fu-Ti)** - The movie begins with Frankie Wei who helps the poor and the oppressed against those who have power. Then, we see Tien Yeh who arrives in a town and is taken to jail. Frankie Wei helps him to escape, but, for a reason that escapes me (no subtitles...), they fight together. An old man tells them not to fight and they meet his grand-daughter.

I didn't understand why, but the two men then live in the forest near the old man's house and they help the young lady when she is attacked. From what I understood, Tien Yeh looks for a sword and he believes that the old man is the one who has it, and Frankie Wei stays there in order that Tien Yeh doesn't escape. Then, the old man leaves a bracelet to his grand-daughter and he goes to fight with some men who look like ninjas. Tien Yeh and Frankie Wei join forces to help him, but he is killed and asks Tien Yeh to take care of the young lady.

After the old man's death, Frankie Wei tries to rob the old man's sword, but Tien Yeh doesn't let him do it and they fight. Tien Yeh is the better one, but he doesn't want to kill Frankie Wei and he throw his pole in the water. The young lady does the same with her grandfather's sword and then we see that it's Frankie Wei who is taken to jail and that the two others stay with each other. That's a good movie, who starts a little bit slowly at the beginning. That's too bad that there aren't dubbed or subbed versions of this one in order to understand better the story...

**Adventure at Shaolin (Taiwan, 1978: Mo Man-Hung)** - First ominous sign, a 100 minute running time. Second, no recognizable characters even 20 minutes in. Yep, *Adventures Of Shaolin* could've avoided being one whole misstep if it had been reduced to a 70 minute exercise. Instead this deathly dull rebels against tyrants with a dash of King Hu perfected scenes at an inn dies way before it's over with only a few minutes of cool kung-fu techniques and training being notable such as monks forming a water bridge and our white haired villain being able to transform his hand into a black one that spells doom for the recipient. Within all this the movie has the balls to try and provide familiar genre-twists rather than ending earlier which it should have. Shame because director Mo Man-Hung has the wonderful *Fearless Fighters* (its US re-edit title) and *Stormy Sun* on his resume. Polly Kuan and Tien Feng appear.

**Adventure for Imperial Treasure (Taiwan, 1979: Che Yue-San) - aka Run Away; Disciple of Shaolin Master** - Routine, late 1970s Taiwanese production starring usual suspects (you'll recognize them). The plot involving a son's revenge (for an anti-Ching Dynasty father killed protecting a Ming treasure map), takes too long to get going, and meanders into typical inn battles, and too much silly beggar "comedy". About halfway, the film finally settles. In his training scenes, [Don Wong Tao] falls back on his usual hung-gar based hard style hands and stancework. He does more kicking than usual in this one. Fine staff and spear work. Lung Fei plays the nearly invincible white-haired bad guy, and puts in one of his best performances.

**Against the Drunken Cat's Paw (Taiwan, 1979: Ting Shan-hsi) - aka No One Can Touch Her; 13 Evil Bandits; Revenge of the Lady Warrior** - I love this film's title. It ranks up there with the *other* English title to Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master: Drunk Monkey in the Tiger's Eye*. This film's other title, *No-One Can Touch Her* is also pretty sweet and tells us all we need to know about the film: lead actress Judy Lee is here to kick butt and chew bubblegum and well...you know the rest.

Like many films made in Hong Kong/Taiwan, the plot is relatively simple made complicated by having far too many characters and subplots thrown in. Here we go: Chin-Lien (Judy Lee) is a drunken beggar who spends her days either getting drunk, practicing kung fu, or breaking into a nobleman's storage room to steal more wine (she's assisted by a little street urchin and her cat). We find out that she was the daughter of a prestigious kung fu master and betrothed to a wandering kung fu expert named Lu. Her father had apprehended a gang called the 14 Demons, but was eventually killed when their leader, Wolf Fang, teamed up with the "2 Bullies" and the "Crippled Gang" to get

revenge. Chin-Lien was blinded when a member of the Crippled Gang, the Five-Venom Dwarf, shot her in the eyes with a blowgun.

Anyways, her ex-fiancé shows up in town looking for her, but turns out to be the target of the Crippled Gang. He befriends another pretty kung fu fighting female named Wang, who's the aforementioned nobleman's daughter, and they eventually get engaged. When Chin-Lien finds out, she goes over to the house and starts crying. Her crying ends up curing her blindness(wtf!?) and it turns out that the whole marriage business was just a ruse to get her out of hiding. They find out that the Crippled Gang, the 2 Bullies, and now the 14 Demons are in town and decide to continue with the fake wedding in order to draw their attention and get into a big kung fu fight.

It doesn't sound all that complicated, but I left a sub-plot involving Big Mallet (Kam Kong, *Master of the Flying Guillotine*), a mute carpenter. He spends most of the film getting abused by a royal official who's on the trail of the bandits. He turns out to be the long-lost son of the nobleman. He ends up playing a vital role in the final fights. Unfortunately, his scenes prior to the last fights really slow down the film, since they don't really have a whole lot to do with the rest of the film.

Anyways, the film for the most part belongs to Judy Lee, who steals practically every scene she's in. Judy's a great actress (she even won the Taiwanese equivalent to the Oscar once) and she plays lovestruck, sad, drunk and carefree, and a number of other emotions with great aplomb. Her action scenes are as graceful and acrobatic as they are fierce, and we get to see her use a number of styles, including the cat style and drunken boxing, as well as the pole and shuangdao (double saber) in her fights.

However, it's because Judy Lee is such a great actress and fighter that the final ends up letting the film down in a big way. For one thing, there are about six good guys taking on all the bad guys, and thus we get to see very little of her fighting in what should be a dramatic fight for her, considering that she's getting her revenge. Second, the final duel between her and Wolf Fang, whose identity will make sense if you follow all the fights, is less than two minutes long. I mean, it's kind of understandable considering that the finale takes up 15 minutes on the whole, but they should've shortened some of the other fights to make this last one really count.

Oh yes, for those of you who like to see dwarves get beat up, there's plenty of that here. I mentioned that one of the Crippled Gang members was named Five-Venom Dwarf. Well, he's really a dwarf and he spends most of the film blowing darts at people at inopportune moments. Well, he ends up getting beat up twice (plus shot at numerous times with a slingshot) by Judy Lee's little street urchin friend.

I really wanted to like this film more than I did. The story is a lot stronger than a lot of kung fu movies being made in the late 1970s and Judy Lee's Chin-Lien is a much more developed character than a lot of others in this type of a film. I also want to recommend whole-heartily any film that has such high-quality femme fu, a dwarf with a blowgun, a blind witch, a guy with a brass club where his arm should be, and a evil villain with wolf-like fangs. But my complaints with the finale really dampened my enthusiasm on the film as a whole. Nonetheless, it is a film that any fan of martial arts should check out.

**All Men Are Brothers (Hong Kong, 1975: Chang Cheh)** - Okay, let me get this out of the way: Chang Cheh why in the name of the Great Wall would you bump off Two Spears Tung Ping (Chan Wai Man) in under a minute and yet let that annoying Black Whirlwind guy last most of the movie? Much less two movies. The character wore out his welcome early in *The Water Margin*. You know your attention span is getting rightly tested when Wang Chung, Chen Kuan Tai and Chan Wai Man's characters are more interesting than Xiaoyi and Wu Song this time around. Thank goodness someone had the foresight to give Wu Song his own movies because you'd never know how interesting and fun he is\* from *The Water Margin* and *All Men Are Brothers*. \*Outside of using a Mantis style kick to defeat his opponent in the *Water Margin*.

Surprisingly, outside of Two Spears' moment of glory, along with Wang Chung (Shi Xiu) and Chen Kuan Tai's (Shi Jin) heroic few moments (YAY! Wuxia heroic bloodshed), the remaining fights in this film are pretty bad (unfortunate given the two Laus, Tong Gai and the fourth guy whose name I can never remember. No offense fourth choreographer!) I can see where Pops was becoming frustrated choreographing the same types of battles, it almost seems like the choreographers just don't care outside of the actors I mentioned. This would usually mean uh-oh right?

Well, the storyline is better here than in *The Water Margin* as the evil Emperor wants to destroy our Liang Shan bandit friends, but pretends to write Xiaoyi and the Liang Shan's pardon. Yet the Liang Shan gang are trying to bring down the fortress where Fang La (Emperor) is so they can rid China of it's most corrupt politician.

I guess Xiaoyi also can add clairvoyance to his prodigy skills: how the heck did he know the Emperor was full of poo? Was it the flute / pipa groupie who saw Xiaoyi's tattoos and then she tipped him off. Let me stop for a minute, the tattoo reveal is one of the most sexy moments I've ever seen Chiang pull off and it's in this movie. Gah! Chang Cheh teases me twice in the first twelve minutes...(Xiaoyi tease and then the CWM moment.) Bad Chang Cheh! While this doesn't drag as much as *The Water Margin* there are a couple of spots where a familiar face would have helped moved the story along.

I'll watch this again at some point because Chen Kuan Tai gets a movie stealing showcase, Chan Wai Man is awesome screaming and slashing his spears about before he goes kaput, and Wang Chung is this film's Lo Mang. Now to track down the movie where Chen Kuan Tai plays this character again. Given the fine quality and excellence of the Wu Song solo movies, I can only expect the same for the one about Shi Jin.

**Ambitious Kung Fu Girl (Hong Kong, 1982: Chin Ku Lu)** - Shaw's weren't especially renowned for kung fu comedies, tending towards heavy toned revenge dramas, but this makes for a nice change of pace. Despite the lighter mood, and rather inconsequential plot, the film still entertains and contains some fantastic action.

The 'Ambitious Kung Fu Girl' of the title is the daughter of a rich nobleman who runs away from home to find the kung fu hero with whom she is besotted. There are some influences from 'Prodigal Son' here because, despite the title, the girl is actually useless at kung fu and her father pays people to let her win in kung fu contests. Worrying for the girl's safety her father puts up a reward for her return which unfortunately draws out some less honest types, such as a scheming brothel owner, who see an opportunity to make some ransom money. It then falls to the kung fu hero, played rather pompously by Chen Kwan Tai, and a would be suitor, Yuen Tak, to save the day with some expertly crafted action.

In contrast to the lightweight tone of the plot, the action is quite frenetic, excellently choreographed and fast paced; mixing fists and swords. Chen Kwan Tai's solid kung fu shapes contrast nicely against Yuen Tak's acrobatics.

**Amsterdam Connection (Hong Kong, 1978: Lo Ke, Fan Mei-Sheng)** - A rare glimpse into the directorial mind of Fan Mei-Sheng (who also co-wrote the so called script). Emulating what Bruce Lee did with *The Way Of The Dragon* by utilizing European locations is not enough when you don't have anything else to offer up. There's the odd good bit of action choreography but with routine plotting, no star power whatsoever, inept English dubbing that only partially makes *Amsterdam Connection* camp, it was pretty much a sealed deal regarding the overall quality. Bolo is a minor standout though as he moves well despite his bulky self. Also with Jason Pai Pao, Wong Yuen-San, Chan Sing and the co-director of this mess himself, Fan Mei-Sheng.

**Angry Guest, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Cheh)** - A sequel to *Duel of Fists*, with David Chiang and Ti Lung taking on the Yakuza. Mainly notable for featuring the HK debut of the legendary Yasuaki Kurata, who gets to enjoy a rather explicit sex scene (maybe that was a conciliation for him having to lose to David Chiang).

Be prepared for a shock, as the Yakuza boss is played by none other than...Chang Cheh, who has shocking bad teeth. And of course, Chang gets to indulge his particular fetish, by having several scenes of topless men slowwwwwly slitting their stomachs open in hara-kiri fashion.

Speaking of fetishes, Ching Li is back, doing absolutley nothing but looking fabulously gorgeous, and there's an exceptionally cute "Japanese" chick played by Fong Yan-ji.

My fave HK villian, Chen Sing, is largely wasted in this, his last film for Shaws before he became an indie star. Still, you have to admire his character's dedication, constantly joining in fights despite having a broken leg. And Bolo looks like the freakish love child of Chang Cheh and Kenneth Anger here - all bare chest and biker threads!

Oh, was it any good? Yeah, it was ok - points for the Jackie Chanesque construction site finale, two hot ladies, cool cast, and some funky fashion. But Mr Chang, please, a dental plan perhaps?

**Angry Hero, The (Taiwan, 1973: Kim Lung)** - Thoroughly lacking in inspiration and ambition, this Taiwanese kung-fu film slowly crawls towards its way too epic 90 minute running time. It actually does have ambition in the sense that it's a way too involved revenge story infested with an overabundance of characters. Despite attempts at making gritty fight scenes (one is set in rain) and Taiwanese favourites Lee I-Min and Lung Fei appearing, it's only the inevitable (it's signaled way beforehand) old man in a wheelchair fight at the end that sparks any feeling of creativity. The filmmakers may have only had that and decided to gamble all on that. It's a losing venture but at least it was a cool attempt.

**Angry River (Hong Kong, 1971: Huang Feng)** - The Martial World in China, circa the Ming Dynasty, is having a little problem. You see, some rat bastard is going around and killing everybody with poison darts. Heck, even brides-to-be are being murdered in their sedans for apparently no reason whatsoever. So, Mr. Lan, who runs the local fort, decides that enough is enough and invites all of the knight errants in the land to form a squad to bring down the son of jackal responsible. Okay, sounds reasonable, right?

Unfortunately for everybody, Mr. Lan himself soon becomes another rung on Poison Dart's (as he's known) belt, leaving the martial world with nobody to lead them against the seemingly invisible menace. Nobody, that is, except for his daughter, Lan Feng (Angela Mao, *The Himalayan* and *Hapkido*). Lan Feng consults with the fort's physician and learns that the only way to heal the poison that the dart was laced with is to give her father the black herb. As it turns out, the only place in China where the herb grows is in SoulValley, located at the other end of the MercilessPass, itself located on the other side of the AngryRiver. I love these Chinese place names. Oh, and the Angry River is nothing less than 1000 miles from Lan's current position. Being a good Chinese girl, filial piety is more important than one's own life and soon she's on her way.

Lan Feng is barely outside the forest that surrounds the fort when she's attacked by a bunch of swordsmen working for King Hell (who'll be played later on by Pai Ying of *Dragon from Russia* and *A Touch of Zen*). Being played by Angela Mao, Lan Feng does the only thing she knows how to do: mercilessly slaughter the no-good thugs. Lan Feng eventually makes it to the AngryRiver, whose name derives itself from the fact that there's apparently a thin layer of pure sodium hovering just a few millimeters above the surface of the water. Thus, anything that touches the water causes the sodium to touch the water as well, resulting in an explosion. Lan Feng makes it to the other side and is soon in MercilessPass.

Why does it have that name? Because the bad-ass kung fu fighter guarding the entrance goes by the name of Lord Merciless (Chang I-Fei of *The Blind Hero Defeating the Evil Wolf*), that's why. Joining Lan Feng is a Shaolin Monk (Fung Ngai, *Lady General Hua Mulan* and *Eight Hundred Heroes*) and a Wah Shan swordsman (the Wah School being the same school that the *Swordsmen* films revolved around). Lord Merciless gives the Monk a sound thrashing and the Wah Shan guy figures that it's best if he just cuts his losses and runs away like the wuss he is. Lan Feng decides to try her luck against Lord Merciless, and gets beaten down just like the monk did. However, Lord Merciless's master is moved by her filial piety and allows her to go to SoulValley.

Arriving in Soul Valley, Lan Feng is accosted by ghosts and by *Yongary, the Monster from the Deep*. I swear I'm not making this up. Angela Mao really does have a brief skirmish with a bipedal theropod with a horn on its nose. She doesn't win the fight, but the guy who guards the black herb ends up giving her some anyway, since she's Angela Mao and all that. He also, however, destroys her kung fu, effectively making her a wuss and a spectator for the next act of the film. Thankfully, King Hell is an impatient man and decides to wipe out Angela's friends and family while she's out trying to not get herself killed by wandering bandits and the treacherous Wah Shan swordsman. So when she returns, she's going to be rather angry. It's a good thing that black herb will not only restore her powers, but double them as well. The best non-fighting scene in the film is an angry Angela Mao chewing on the herb, after which she starts glowing red and hitting holes in the wall with her palm (bear in mind that this movie was made before the classic *Five Fingers of Death*).

*The Angry River* is important for two reasons. One, it was the debut film for the fledgling Golden Harvest Studio. At the time, the studio to beat was the Shaw Brothers, who had all the talent, sets, costumes, what have you. Very good. However, the Golden Harvest had a few aces up their sleeves. For one, it wasn't long before they had a fellow named Bruce Lee making movies with them. That really made a difference now, didn't it? They also had the likes of Sammo Hung, the latter of whom started out as a supporting actor and fight choreographer and eventually became one of GH's directors. Some of his 80s work would go on to become the biggest money-makers for Golden Harvest.

The other reason that this film is important is because of Angela Mao, who owns the screen with her trademark intensity. It's pretty obvious that Golden Harvest initially tried to market Angela as the alternative to Cheng Pei-Pei. Thankfully, for all of this film's merits, it was for the best that Bruce Lee blew everybody else out of the water, because it was his success that helped Angela to be marketed afterward as the Female Bruce Lee, a title that served her talents better than as the "Next Cheng Pei Pei." The setback is that 30 minutes or so in which her character



can't fight and has to depend on others, especially co-star Kao Yuan (of the cult classic *Calamity of Snakes*), to protect her. It's a bit of a cop-out and when she does become a sword-swinging diva at the end, it's almost too little, too late.

Sammo Hung and genre veteran Han Ying-Chieh handle the action duties, as is par for the course in an early Angela Mao movie (the two also show up as the main villain's bodyguards). The swordplay shows a strong *chambara* (Japanese samurai film) and Western swashbuckling influence, as if Chinese swordplay hadn't yet come into its own in 1971. It's fast and bloody, although without the balletic embellishments that'd define Chinese movie swordplay later on. Attempts to use wires are extremely awkward; Sammo is many things but a good wire-fu choreographer he is not. The kung fu fisticuffs are sparse and competent at best, as the genre in its Golden Age incarnation was still young at this point. Thankfully, Sammo and Han Ying throw in some nice exotic weapons, such as a Golden Coin Halberd, the regular Halberd, the Wind and Fire Wheels (which look like a pair of half buzz saws that the wielder uses for close-quarters combat), and the Zhuo, or Claw (which looks like a giant back scratcher). Plus, you know, they threw in a kung fu Yongary for good measure, too. Any movie with a kung fu Yongary can't be it all bad, can it?

**Angry Tiger (Hong Kong, 1973: Heung Ling) – aka Spirits of Bruce Lee** - The film begins with an unknown man running from masked thugs, a box under his arm. The thugs catch up to him, kill him and the one who did the killing takes a pocket watch from around his neck. Cut to a plane landing and the opening credits. Next we meet Chan Chun Wei played by Michael Chan Wai Man, newly arrived in Thailand from China. He's looking for his brother.

On his way he meets Li Pai Yu played by Thai actor, Poon Lok, who is heading the same way as him. They become friends and Li shows him to the hotel where his brother last stayed, as Chan has a letter with the address.

Chan Chun Wei meets a Chinese family that has some knowledge of what happened to his brother as well as knowing a little kung fu. They team up and patiently plan a way to get to the killers. Chan eventually loses his patience after finding the man with his brother's pocket watch. He goes to the killers compound alone at night and is able to infiltrate, but has to leave before getting the leader because of a knife wound. Meanwhile he and the daughter of the family he's staying with, played by Suen Ga-Lam, are falling in love.

This early Chan Wai Man film is all shot on location in Thailand, and other than Chan and the family he stays with, the rest of the cast is Thai. This gives the film that unique feel you get with a Chinese directed film shot in Thailand. At first I thought it was the wrong film when the title screen came up and it said 'Spirits of Bruce Lee'. I had to go check HKMDB, and yes it is an aka. I have no idea why they called it that, other than to cash in, since there is nothing even remotely related to Bruce other than it being filmed in Thailand as was Bruce's first martial arts film, *The Big Boss*.

The action choreography is good and most of the punches and kicks connect. Chan would definitely get better over time, but he is already very good in this film...If you love Chan Wai Man and early 1970's bashers you will most likely enjoy this, but if you're not a fan of this era this may be a bit too generic for you.

**Angry Young Man (Taiwan, 1983: Wong Sing-Loy)** - You see, most kung fu movies tend to achieve badness in one of several ways: cliché script that only serves to move us from one fight scene to the next; dubbing (I personally like old school dubbing, although sometimes it's obvious that the dubbers are quite uninterested in what their doing and it reflects in the fun factor of the film); tacky costumes; low budget; unimaginative and sloppy fight direction; overabundance of unfunny comedy; and general sleaziness. Now that's all good as far as it goes, and usually the filmmakers can squeeze a few redeeming features out of your most horrid kung fu movies. Look at *Kung Fu Rebels*: I really detested that piece of tripe, but once it got past the mean-spirited violence and abundance of unfunny comedy and focused on ripping off the good parts of *The Drunken Master*, it wasn't too bad.

Angry Young Man, on the other hand, becomes decent watching only for about five minutes at the end when Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee explodes onto the screen. But everything before and after that is just...well...gah!

There are two parallel stories in this movie, although they never really interact in any meaningful way. To be honest, when one plot leads into the other, it's done in such a silly way that you really want to yell, "Are you friggin' kidding me?"

The film begins with a karate seminar being held in Taiwan. The keynote speaker is a Chinese-born karate specialist named Kang Tin (who'll eventually be played by Hwang Jang Lee) who's supposed to fly in from Japan in order to supervise a series of tests for potential black belts. Kang's flight has been delayed, so the MC, a fighter named Wang Wan-Si (Yeung Lun, *Supergirl of Kung Fu* and *Against the Drunken Cat's Paws*), asks his teacher and the head of one of the local dojos, a certain Mr. Tang (Pai Ying of *Royal Warriors* and *The Stomp*) to speak instead. Mr. Tang immediately starts extolling the virtues of karate and criticizing Chinese kung fu as if he were in a Jimmy Wang Yu (or Bruce Lee) film made circa 1972 and set in pre-WW2 China. Unfortunately, this is 1983, which means that WW2 and the Japanese occupation of Formosa has already occurred. Taiwanese people understandably don't want to hear their own culture being put down while that of the oppressor is glorified, sort of like how Jewish people generally aren't very happy when a famous person says anything positive about Hitler. It only takes a few seconds before everybody gets up and walks out on Mr. Tang. Sorry dude.

This particular part of the film is unbearably anachronistic, especially when people start complaining about valuing Chinese culture and saving its people and whatnot. The characters in this movie talk as if the Japanese were still occupying Taiwan, which I assume ended back in 1945, 38 years before this film is set. This sort of blatant nationalism might've been fine (to some extent) when Bruce Lee and Jimmy Wang Yu did it, since they at least set most of their movies in period. However, for people in the 1980s to talk as if the Japanese were planning on re-occupying the island is so racist as to become goofy and ruin most of the internal logic that kung fu movies tend to depend on.

We then switch to the life and times of Brother Lau (Alan Chui of *Incredible Kung Fu Mission* and *Shaolin Temple Against Lama*), an old colleague of Wang's. Apparently Lau had everything he needed in order to become a renown kung fu expert. He threw it all away years before, however, and now works as a mid-level Triad smuggler. His flunkies spend their time harassing girls and getting high, while he pines for his love, the beautiful Shao Wei (*Lunatic Frog Women's* Jue Yuen-Yee). Apparently Lau is having some problems with a shipment, which leads to his superiors, Bald Boss (Hung Lau of *The Woman Who Eat People* and *A Taste of Cold Steel*) and Overbite Guy (whom I think is Chang Chi-Ping of *Woman Avenger*), kidnapping and torturing one of Lau's subordinates, Ah Chan (Cheng Kang-Yeh, whom Shaw fans will recognize from *Executioners from Shaolin* and *Heroes of the East*).

The film then jumps back to the life and times of Wang Wan-Si, whom we learn has a day job as a soda delivery man. This is one of the few kung fu movies I've seen that suggests that a kung fu/karate master actually has a normal job outside of class. He's harassed by Lau's men while on the job, and it takes a significant amount of taunting before he finally kicks the s\*\*\* out of them. Suddenly, Overbite Guy shows up and beats the hell out of Wang, although I'm not sure why they were screwing with him in the first place. Wang apparently is a busy guy, because it seems he has a job at construction site as well, and Lau's men just don't want to give him a break. So another fight breaks out, although this time Wang finds out that the men belong to the same gang as Lau.

Wang confronts Lau, and the two get into a big argument. Well, actually it's just Wang berating Lau for becoming a crook instead of a decent man. The police show up and are about to arrest Lau when Wang lies and tells him that Lau had nothing to do with his being assaulted. Lau then tells Overbite Guy that he wants out of the business and is attacked by his own men for his troubles. Lau holds his own, but Overbite Guy is too much for him. Wang and Lau meet up and have another heart-to-heart, with Lau deciding to join Wang's karate class. What a tool.

Now we go back to the Japanese karate subplot, which gets even more ludicrous than any Taiwanese ninja movie you can imagine. At Mr. Tang's dojo, one of the mottos there is "Never Apologize." What this means is that if you accidentally hurt your partner while sparring, then tough titties for him. We get to this in action when a student accidentally hits his partner, apologizes, and subsequently gets the snot beaten out of him by his sensei. Of course, in the real world, such a dojo would have very few, if any students. Moreover, most normal people would call the police and accuse such a karate teacher of assault and battery. But not in this movie. Apparently the filmmakers think very little of their own people and portray the Taiwanese as being too stupid to realize that there are dozens of kung fu schools in city that *probably* don't make a habit of mercilessly abusing their students while making racial epithets and glorifying another culture. Man, what sort of cracked universe are these people living in?

In any case, the film will soon forget about that plot until the last act. Let's go back to the whole Lau-Goes-Straight business. Obviously, Bald Boss and Overbite Guy aren't really happy that they're about to lose one of their own. So they decide to put a bit of pressure on him. How about they kidnap Shao Wei, who's been something of a non-entity up until this point. Don't worry, she'll continue to be one for the duration of the film. The Triads plan on kidnapping her, but Ah Chan warns her and she avoids becoming a victim of the Gruesome Overbite Guy. That means more torture is in the works for Ah Chan. Of course, Lau wants to help his old colleague, so he goes to the gym where Ah Chan is being held captive.

A fight breaks out shortly after Lau arrives and Ah Chan is hurled off a balcony and dies (or almost does, I'm not sure). Wang Wan-Si and the rest of his karate posse show up to help their big brother, but unfortunately, one of their number, Chow San (Hon Gwok-Choi of *Call Me Dragon* and *Little Superman*) is taken, beaten, and hung. He's rescued and taken to the hospital while Wang and Lau go off in search of Bald Boss's HQ. Bald Boss sends some men

to destroy Wang's house and make it look like an accident, but usually driving a car into a person's property and slicing its inhabitants up with machetes is a little hard to dress up as an accident. Let me point out that this violent incident is never mentioned again in the film, but I'll get to that in a little more detail in a moment. Wang and Lau corner Bald Boss and Overbite Guy at a construction yard, where our heroes have to beat up the bad guys while avoiding heavy construction equipment. The entire set piece is undercranked, which makes it one of the goofiest and idiotic action sequences I've seen in a Chinese movie, which is really saying something.

Wang and Lau are about to give Bald Boss his just desserts when the cops arrive, led by a corrupt chief. The corrupt chief tries to bribe our heroes into forgetting this whole mess ever happened, as if watching your friends nearly get tortured to death and having your house destroyed is something easy to turn a blind eye to. When they refuse, the chief...and this is where the two plots connect...reminds them that they have a karate examination that day and that if they persist in looking for justice, they'll miss the examination. I mean, WHAT THE HECK???? It is official: the writers of this movie obviously live in some strange fantasy world. Lau and Wang still refuse, so the corrupt boss resorts to good ol' fashioned police brutality in order to force our heroes to participate in the examination and forget about the whole business involving murderous Triads.

The rest of the movie will revolve around karate exam, completely jettisoning the whole Triad plotline, including whatever the fallout was from that home massacre segment. I guess those particular family members weren't that important. What is important, though, at least in the eyes of writers Yu Cheng-Chun and Kwok Yan, is that the exam is being headed by Kang Tin, his son (Ng Ming-Choi, a short, stout fellow who viewers might recognize as a guard who gets killed by Bolo Yeung in *Enter the Dragon*), and another fighter named Cho Cho Mo (Taiwanese mainstay Choi Wang), all three of whom (plus Mr. Tang) are sadistic SOBs. Cho Cho Mo starts beating up (complete with limb breaking) the Taiwanese students, causing the referee, Lee (I think it's Chen Shan of *Ninja in the USA* and *Shaolin vs. Lama*) to get involved and beat up Cho Cho Mo. Kang's son gets involved and things *really* start to get violent.

Lots of kung fu movies don't have plots worth writing home about, but few of them are as ineptly nonsensical as what we're treated to in *Angry Young Man*. That transition from triad film to karate film near the end is asinine beyond all belief and when you get right down to it, nothing about the movie makes very much sense. The fact that the script ignores the whole Triad story in the last 25 minutes is a particularly powerful kick in the nuts, considering that it took up most of the film's running time during the first two acts. The whole anti-Japanese sentiment that rears its head whenever a scene is set at a karate school is far more racist and mean-spirited than the characters the film portrays. There are numerous scenes that serve absolutely no narrative purpose in the story, like an early bit where a bunch of thugs try to rape a young female street peddler, only to get beat up by Wang's colleagues (one of whom imitates an intellectually-challenged man while he's at it). Then there's the scene where Wang's father (and Lau's teacher) goes to visit Lau, but doesn't actually talk to him because he's busy ignoring the thugs' insults. Wang's father disappears from the film never to be seen again after that. There's another scene in which some thugs try to rape a girl and are given an a\*\* kicking by an old cook (Chan Wai-Lau, the old master in *The Fearless Hyena*). Then there's the end, in which the owner of the Japanese dojo actually congratulates the men for humiliating the Japanese visitors. Wha--?? And then the corrupt police chief shows up to award our heroes with a plaque...that's it, I just friggin' give up.

Whenever I review movies, I rarely pay attention to the writers. But the plot here is just one colossal clusterf\*\*\* that I felt compelled to look up the filmographies of both writers. Yu Cheng-Chun worked on a number of films as director and assistant director, but wrote only three films. Kwok Yan worked before with director Wong Sing-Lui on the early Dorian Tan Tao-Liang film *Hero of the Waterfront*. Wong Sing-Lui had a decent career with kung fu movies, including the well-received Mainland Chinese kung fu film *Arhats in Fury*. That film has been praised for its themes of Shaolin monks being reluctant to help others who are suffering injustices. It's a shame that Wong couldn't do anything interesting with this film's script, although I doubt Tsui Hark could do anything good with the hack job Wong had to work with.

Of course, the script isn't the only the way in which this film fails miserably. The take-home theme is supposedly that kung fu is not inferior to karate. Said point is supposed to be driven home by Lau switching from karate to kung fu when he takes on Kang Tin at the very end. While he does get some good hits in, Kang Tin still f\*\*\*s him up royally and gives him a thrashing he won't soon forget. As usual, when Hwang Jang Lee finally loses at the end, it's not very convincing. So how can you glorify a martial arts style when the character can't even use it effectively to defeat the villain at the end?

Speaking of styles, let's talk about the action, brought to you courtesy of Chow Kong and Chang Ka Ka. A search at the Hong Kong Movie Database revealed nothing on the latter. Chow Kong, however, was a movie veteran who made a living off playing thugs and extras and whatnot in dozens of kung fu films. He only choreographed a handful of movies, all of them obscure titles, like *Green Killer* and *Little Mad Guy*. The earlier fights in this movie are among the worst-choreographed pieces of crap I've personally seen. The punches and kicks are so sloppy and lacking in power that they make Jimmy Wang Yu at his most arm-flailingest look like a seasoned master by comparison. There are a few isolated moments in which it's clear that the performers know what they're doing, but the two...two action directors are frankly at a loss on how to bring said abilities to the screen. I mean, how do you waste the talents of

Alan Chui, one of Taiwan's best choreographers and a great screen fighter? Or Hon Gwok-Choi, who was so flexible he was pulling off acrobatic feats in *Running on Karma* as he was nearing 50! It's rather sad that Chui wasn't entrusted with the kung fu responsibilities, since he would've been able to salvage the non-Hwang fights in this movie and it would've been more tolerable.

People expecting much from Hang Jang Lee will most likely be disappointed. He doesn't even show up in the film until the hour mark or so. Even then, he doesn't fight until the last 10 minutes and his kicking exhibition lasts about three minutes tops. Hwang does get to let loose a number of impressive boots while he's working Alan Chui over, such as a double jumping side kick, a forward jumping back kick, and a few other neat boots. Hwang's moves are executed with snap and power, which is missing in all of the other fights and it's a shame that there isn't more of him here. Hwang comes across as being invincible here and viewers will appreciate just how powerful his character is portrayed as being, despite his losing to cheating moves. Any sort of good will this film earns is because of Hwang, although truth to be told, this is really one of his worst movies, period. You're really better off looking for the final fight on YouTube and forgetting the rest. It's not worth it. Trust me. I thought it was and I was wrong. Don't repeat my mistakes. Please.

**Anonymous Heroes, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Chang Cheh)** - I liked the beginning and the end much more than the stagnant middle. There is a nice impish byplay between Ti Lung and David Chiang throughout the film. One of the highlights for me was the fight between the two in there "how long will it last" house. I thought overall the fighting was more interesting than the gun battles.

This is a Republic era film (critic Po Fung states it is around 1926 and 1927 which would mean this takes place during KMT's Northern Expedition; interesting that KMT is the good guys here) so you expect that there will be warlords vying for weapons like Cheh apprentice's John Woo's *The Young Dragons* (1974). But the main plot is the comradery between Chiang and Lung and hanger-on Pepper (Ching Li) as they plot to steal arms and bring them south to the unifying movement while inadvertently becoming heroes. There is an interesting sub-angle on what happens to her dad because of her actions.

This has been noted as probably being the first Hong Kong production with horses chasing a train. It reminded me somewhat of Buster Keaton's *The General* (1926) though Keaton used a real train that plummeted instead of the obvious set here, yes Keaton destroyed a real train by dropping it off the tracks where it stayed until World War II (used for metal.) Not the best or worst miniatures I have seen, but the worst effects were the horrible rolling painted trees that were seen quite often on the train ride (you have to check out the one's in Shaw Brothers *The Golden Buddha* (1966) which are worse.) The chase was a good idea, it just did not come off well, and especially when you see how slow the train was going (though this was explained in the plot.)

The ending (not the coda which is interesting in itself) was influenced by *The Wild Bunch* (1969) a film Chang Cheh was quite fond of. Cheh was also influenced by Arthur Penn, especially *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and one reviewer on IMDB noted that some of the soundtrack came from Penn's *The Chase* (1966, John Barry did the music) but I cannot currently corroborate that. Some of the logic during this battle maybe a little farfetched, but it fits well within Cheh's themes throughout many of his films.

**Arhats In Fury (People's Republic of China, 1985: Wong Sing-Lui)** - Mainland Chinese production that attempts to echo much that have been said in martial arts cinema before, including in Shaolin Temple (Jet Li's breakthrough film). What we get here are generally finely lensed landscapes, buddhism vs. violence rationales and what I assume is a bunch of genuine Wushu performers adding authentic skill to the film. Director Wong Sing-Lui manages with a heavy hand examine the theme of the film in a slightly above average way but what's missing in the equation is a constant quality showcase for the action performers. The first real fight stands as the best in the film, combining fast, clear and acrobatic traits but the time subsequently offers up more messy and large scenarios than anything else. There's an art in making an epic immersing. That art isn't fully practiced here but *Arhats In Fury* earns a minor recommendation for the serious nature it does possess.

**Art of War by Sun Tzu (Taiwan, 1979: King Weng)** - This utterly average kungfu fare will enter and leave your mind like the bad memory of an alien abduction. The only plus to suffering this kungfu film instead of alien abduction is that you won't have to get an anal probe.

Taking its title from a book that has nothing to do with the plot, action, or any goings-on whatsoever contained in the film (aside from some voice-over quotes), this is the story of five students who are learning Tiger style. Some leave to visit dead parents and others leave to become great generals.

Actually, only one aspires to greatness, and he achieves it by saving the life of a king. Everyone celebrates, and the student gets his pals jobs. Well, as fate has it, it ain't too long before the power and glory goes to the guy's head. He abducts his female classmate, beats up another, and then blinds the poor lug.

One of the other students becomes an advisor to the king, making the corrupt guy (named Chan) jealous. So he does what any jealous corrupt guy would do, and cuts off the legs of his enemy, then lobs him into the dungeon along with the blind guy.

Eventually, treachery is unmasked, some people fly, and there is talk of the good ol' Five Elements style we all know and love. The entire affair seems written in one of those exercises where 5th grade students pass around a story, and each student has to write the next page of it.

On top of the lame, confusing plot, the kungfu is pretty lackluster. I had to go back and do a decent amount of research just to remember what the hell happened during this film. So I can't say it's the worst piece of trash ever made. No, as long as Wong Jing and Oliver Stone are still making movies, I reserve that monicker for their work. But this is a pretty lame duck that I wouldn't want to recommend to anyone unless you are stranded alone on a desert island and totally starved for kungfu.

**Assassin, The (Hong Kong, 1967: Chang Cheh)** - The Assassin came out in the same year as Jimmy Wang Yu's classic The One Armed Swordsman and though The Assassin is not as well known as the latter I found myself enjoying it more. And that was even without sub-titles. So to some extent I didn't completely understand what was going on in the film, but the excellent sword fights from beginning to end still made it a good fun film to watch.

Chang Cheh was to become renown as a kung-fu director for Shaw, but he also directed many of the Shaw sword fighting classics such as this one, Girl with the Thunderbolt Kick (Cheng Pei Pei), One Armed Swordsman and the New One Armed Swordsman (David Chiang).

The Wang Yu sword fighting films always feel much more authentic than those in which he utilizes kung-fu. His swordsmanship looks pretty good – quick and concise while his kung-fu has always looked very slow and pedestrian to me. He also has those baby face looks – kind of like Audey Murphy in those old westerns – but its still easy to buy into his character in this film. And it was kind of nice seeing him with two arms for a change!

The film opens in Spaghetti western style – with a jangly almost surf music soundtrack – as Wang Yu enters a house and interrupts a couple making love to carry out his mission. He is a professional killer and quickly dispatches his target. The wife pleads for her life and looks up into his merciless eyes. All the while the camera has been freeze framing certain moments and it does so on his eyes. It's a great shot, but surprisingly he walks away – allowing her to live this day – but she then springs out of her kneeling position to throw a knife at his back – he swishes it around straight back at her heart.

After each killing, Wang Yu ceremoniously washes the blood off his hands, but it is clear that the killing has gotten to him – but there is no way out of his life. It follows him wherever he goes. Literally. Throughout the film he is surrounded by scores of killers looking for revenge. Some of the fights are well choreographed with a lot of bloodletting and they appear to be very much influenced by the Japanese chambara films of the time.

My mom always taught me to wash after killing !

Like Clint Eastwood at the end of his Spaghetti westerns, Jimmy Wang Yu walks off alone into the distance – leaving behind him a swathe of dead bodies. I enjoy a good sword fighting film and though it would certainly have been interesting to know exactly why everyone was trying to kill Wang Yu it was still a good old fashioned action film.

**Assassinator, The (Hong Kong, 1968: Joe Law)- aka The Killer Sword; Fighting in Mas Village** - The movie begins with Cheung Ying Tsoi who is a vagabond and arrives in a town where he befriends a little boy who is also a vagabond and is helped by a young woman (Suet Nei) after he has robbed food. While they are discussing, a man hurries to tell Suet Nei that her father is attacked in their house and he also tells the same thing to Chu Kong, who is enjoying his meal in the inn with Yip Ching and Chu Kong doesn't even go to help his master.

While they are fighting in Suet Nei's house, the bandits (lead by Ma Kei) are defeated by Cheung Ying Tsoi, who fights with a wooden stick in which a sword is hidden. When Chu Kong arrives, he looks down on Cheung Ying Tsoi and he even attacks him, but he is defeated. He is so angry against the vagabond that he tells Yip Ching, who leads him to the chief of the bandits, Shih Kien and they plan to attack Suet Nei's father (who has lost almost all his men) again, after having get rid of Cheung Ying Tsoi, who is hurt on both hands by Shih Kien's knives and can't use his hands anymore for a long while.

They finally chase Suet Nei's father (badly hurt ) and Suet Nei from their own house and when Chu Kong arrives to share the loot, they cheat him and they chase him. A while later, in the inn, he is bullied by Shih Kien's men and badly hit by them and he escapes. He meets Cheung Ying Tsoi and this latter leads him to his master who is recovering from his wound and he asks for his forgiving and together with Cheung Ying Tsoi, Suet Nei and the help of the little vagabond, they plan to take revenge on Shih Kien and his men. Cheung Ying Tsoi, Suet Nei and Chu Kong are excellent in this movie, and, as usual when he plays villains' roles, Shih Kien is as evil as possible and how excellent he is playing this !! The little boy is good too, and, once again what a superb movie, not to be missed !!

**Assault of Final Rival (Taiwan, 1978: Li Su)** - The beggar Wong Tao, is taught the art of Kung-Fu by an ancient Buddhist monk. He becomes a great master, deriving his strength from the length of his hair. After his hair is cut off by a scheming opponent, Wong is determined to strengthen his skills, which he believes will help him in the re-growth of his hair. Incredibly, somehow he is able to use his long, twirling locks to defeat his foes and conquer his enemies.

This movie started off on the right foot, with a fight scene, and then we are shown a room full of "baddies" discussing how they must get rid of their rival. In this scene we are treated to some "classically bad dubbing", I especially liked it when I heard the word "buster" used as reference to Wong Tao's opposition, Funny Stuff. (as heard on audclips\_01 and 02)

The story in this movie starts off simple enough, a group of villains wants to dispose of their only opposing threat, the hair whipping Wong Tao. The plot later thickens when Wong Tao's girlfriend who is pregnant with his baby, is forced by the main villain to kill Wong Tao. She could not get herself to do it, so instead, she cuts off his hair which then deems him powerless.

As the story progresses on, I noticed the dialogue driven portions of the movie are very slow moving, they tend to talk somewhat slow in attempt to make the scene's of a more dramatic feel. (as seen/heard in vidclip\_04) Overall a slightly above average movie.

The movie was not made as a comedy. Although, a few scenes with some very entertaining, "bad dubbing", did manage to get a few smiles as well as a snicker from me. There was also one brief instance, when during a fight where Wong Tao was fighting against 3 guys, one of them attempted to poke him in the eyes, and Wong Tao blocked it "3 Stooges" style. (as seen in vidclip\_03) This also made me smile. Another thing I always find amusing, not funny in a laughing matter, but just amusing. The young boy who plays Wong Tao's child later on in the film, of course was given an older sounding girls voice. ... why do they do this in kung fu movies? LOL.

The action in this movie started out fair, but then throughout the duration of the movie, we are not treated to too much more. In one scene when Wong Tao's character was practicing, it was plainly clear it was not really him, but a double, a lot of acrobatic moves were being displayed in this scene. Of course I am only assuming it was a double being used because we never get to see his face once. (as seen in vidclip\_02) It's always great to see Wong Tao put on a display of his martial skills, I have always enjoyed his performances, and this movie was no exception. Overall fair action, just which there was more of it.

The guy that "doubled" for Wong Tao gets my vote for Standout Performance, Great Acrobatics! No, but seriously, Wong Tao of course, I always enjoy his performances, no matter how much he is doubled.

I'm not sure if this movie is available for rent anywhere, but if you are as much of a fan of "bad dubbing" or Wong Tao as I am, then I see no reason why you would NOT pick this movie up. It can be had for less than the price of a McChicken Sandwich at McDonalds, which sells for a \$1. .... aw man .. why did I have to say that.. now I'm getting hungry.

**Association, The (Hong Kong, 1975: Jeong Chang-Hwa)** - *"She was from a good family, but she was not a virgin. Look at those huge nipples."* This line, spoken by the film's hero, sort of summarizes what's wonderfully wrong about this sleazy kung fu film about a detective determined to bring down a woman trade association. One moment he's giving a moral lecture to a lecherous old man exploiting women; the next, he's attaching electric wires to a female suspect's nipples to interrogate her. Messy plot and relatively standard execution keep this from being great, but it does move at a good pace and offers some fun to be had. There are quite a few (naked) Caucasian ladies in the film, and as typical to Asian films of the era, they are no beauty pageants, to put it kindly.

It looks like something went awry in production. Tien Ni is soooo gorgeous (prudish as always) but her part is shoehorned in. Angela Mao's part is small. Carter Wong comes in and tells everyone that Rosebud is a sled and a symbol of his lost childhood innocence. Simon Yuen has a ONE SECOND cameo in a flashback. What's with the Go-Go Satan Abortion Style? My favorite part is when the hero decides that the best way to protect the woman is to hide in her closet and wait for the bad guys to come in! It's a pretty fun movie if you watch it partially inebriated, as any 90 minutes would be that contain go-go dancing abortionists, exploding skulls, naked lesbians, and horny old men having their crotch energetically stomped on.

**Attack of the Joyful Goddess (Taiwan, 1983: Chang Cheh)** - aka **Attack of the Venoms** - Nothing makes me happier than when, after a film's final scene, I just sort of sit there, mouth agape, turn to the person sitting next to me on the futon, and say, "What the hell was that?"

This film ranks way up there on the "...the hell?" meter, with all sorts of weirdness and treachery going on. It starts off with an explanation of what a Joy God is -- a little prop doll, but with all sorts of superstitions attached to it. It must be stored face down, lest bad luck and possession ensue. So they are sort of like the Peking Opera equivalent of ventriloquist dummies, and equally as creepy.

Frankly, I don't get what's so joyful about them. I mean, all you have to do is pick the thing up or accidentally tip it a little and it gets all pissy and starts jangling all about and possessing and killing and making people spit up green bubbles. You know, ghost stuff. I don't know much about joy gods or theater superstitions in China (or in America), so I have to assume there is some benefit to having these ill-tempered little bastards lying around, but I'll be damned if I can figure it out.

If anyone asks you if you want to buy a joy god, just say, "No thank you. Can I interest you in this evil ventriloquist dummy from hell?"

The film's plot centers around an Opera troupe whose lead actress becomes the object of obsession with the local military commander. Because the guy is an all-around bag o' slime, she refuses his advances. Besides, she and the lead actor, named Handsome White, have been a couple since they were kids. Meanwhile, one of the stage hands accidentally turns over a Joy God, which means she is soon possessed and burping up bubbles of pestilence. She never really gets all that involved in the plot. She gets pussy, dies, and they bury her. The end.

Not wanting to draw the ire of the military, the rest of the actors in the troupe conspire to murder Handsome so that Miss Fa will give up on him and go with the commander. No sooner is the heinous deed committed than all sorts of hardships befall the troupe. The murderous actors keep dying in accidents, Handsome's ghost keeps struttin' around, and the new lead actor, Brother Shaw, sides with Miss Fa and protects her from the commander and the other actors who want to force her to become the commander's concubine. Shaw is a legit tough guy, too, so no one wants to fuck with him.

Before too long, all hell literally breaks loose, as Shaw intentionally summons up the Joy God to avenge the murder. The actors, in turn, summon up some fire breathing god. And lots of corpses show up and start fighting. Wow! Now that's a play I'd pay to see!

While there isn't a lot of kungfu until the end, there is a ton of acrobatic Peking Opera, and the interesting plot makes this a quality horror film. Astute viewers will, of course, recognize Lu Feng and Chiang Sheng, both members of the legendary "Venoms." While the plot may lose you from time to time, as Hong Kong horror/fantasy/kungfu films often do, it's a very interesting, highly enjoyable freak-out of a film that I highly recommend. Fight fans will be disappointed, but fans of weirdness will cough up their own spinal cords in joy.

**Avenging Eagle, The (Hong Kong, 1978: Sun Chung)** - This is my third favorite Sun Chung film. There's no denying the complexity of Chik and Cheuk's relationship, and how fully vested Ti Lung and Fu Sheng are in their roles. Why Fu Sheng didn't win an award for playing Cheuk Yi Fan, I will never know. He had to show many different sides to that character (as did Ti) and he was just marvelous here. It's obvious how much I dig Ti Lung using pole weapons and he was great fun to watch here. I really believed the arc that Chik goes through too.

Besides, Double Sword in Sleeve is just such a neat concept for a hidden weapon.

Anyway, lifelong assassin Chik Ming Sing is the Black Eagle of the Thirteen Eagles of the Iron Boat Gang. A hardened killer, Chik suddenly has a change of heart when a family nurses him back to health after a botched robbery. Cheuk's relationship with Chik is strained until the two men realize they need each other to defeat a common enemy, the Godfather of the Thirteen Eagles and leader of the Iron Boat Gang, Yoh Xi Hung.

I've mentioned this before, but my one quibble with this film, is the Thirteen Eagles Godfather should have been a serious martial artist, the doubling for Ku Fung in the final fight is very distracting to me and while he handled the dramatics with his usual fine work, the complicated flips, rolls and such were obviously not him. Of course, I'd nominate Chan Wai Man as the Iron Boat Godfather because he so well embodied older villains *Judgement of An Assassin* and *Broken Oath*. The Ku Fung doubling is done and it just disappoints me a tad to be taken out of that intense fight during those moments.

It was fun to discover Tang Chia's cameo here (I like his acting. He always kicks it up a notch in between his wonderful displays of Kung Fu.) Also I just noticed the Gray and Yellow Eagles both only had one arm.

Outside of the fight gaffs for the Godfather, *The Avenging Eagle* is an excellent movie and another fine morality tale of laws and lawlessness from Sun Chung. It's sometimes too heavy for me to watch given how bleak the material is, but definitely deserves all the praise.

**Avenging Sword, The (Hong Kong, 1968: Ling Yun)** - The story begins with a band of bandits who slaughter some migrating villagers. Suet Nei appears when the bandits are enjoying their loot and she punishes them. Later, she meets Lui Kei and he leads her to a secret cave where some people (including women and a little girl) are making weapons and after they have left, some bandits lead by a man wearing black clothes and mask slaughter everybody and when Lui Kei returns to the cave, he believes that it's Suet Nei who did this and he tries to kill her, but doesn't do it and he even helps her when she is attacked by bandits. They finally become friends and they are trapped in a town where they are lead to a house (I recognized the Chinese characters for "big sword" among the three characters written on the wooden plaque) where there are four old men as chiefs. They discuss for a while, Lui Kei fights with one of them, and they leave the house.

Before that, Suet Nei has saved a man and it happens that he is a member of the first gang I mentioned. Later, the two gangs fight and the "big sword" clan wins with Suet Nei and Lui Kei's help. A good movie, but it's too bad that it's only in Cantonese and without even Chinese subtitles

**Awaken Punch (Hong Kong, 1973: Fong Lung-Seung) aka Village on Fire; Buddhist Shaolin Avengers; Fury of the Black Belt** - Solid basher with action done by Yuen Woo-Ping. Henry Yu Yung (who I am unfamiliar with) is the lead, and actually seems to be a decent actor/screen fighter(for basher-style). Tien Feng is the main baddie, and his henchman are played by Fong Yau, and San Kuai, who play their typical scum bag characters. They are known as "Black and White Fan", which makes you think there will be some cool fan fighting...but there isn't.



The plot is decent revenge-fu. Henry Yu Yung's character is a bully beater, his Dad (while on his deathbed) makes him promise to quit fighting and take care of his farm, and family. When he arrives, a land shark tries to bribe him for his family's land, and he isn't having it. So the baddies begin harassing his family. He endures some pretty shitty things happening to his family out of respect for the oath, until the baddies eventually and inevitably cross the line.. It is a pretty dark movie. Anyway, from there on out it is just bad ass basher fighting. I was pretty surprised by this movie, it may not be great, but I really enjoyed it.

**Back Alley Princes (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Wei) – aka Back Alley Princess** - Though this film stars two of the kung fu female legends of the 70s – Angela Mao and Polly Sheng Kwan – the focus of the film is not really on action – but instead it is a warmhearted and comic film with only sporadic action throughout. It almost has a certain Chaplinesque sentimental feel to it combined with some other more intense scenes that seemed influenced by the Blaxploitation films. It all makes for a rewarding film that is very different from others I have seen from that same time period. The film version I saw was unfortunately dubbed, with German subs and a with a very poor picture transfer.

Polly and her friend Sam Hui (Aces Go Places) are two orphans adrift and trying to make do on the streets of HK during the 1970's. Making do usually consists of either scamming or petty robbery. None of this though is for particularly high stakes and both of them basically have good hearts. On one occasion Polly picks someone's wallet – and is horrified to find out how much money she has stolen. So she only takes out what she needs and returns the wallet to the man's pocket!

The other unusual thing about Polly's character is that she is disguised as a male throughout or as a man pretending to be a woman! With her short hair, dirty face and male clothes no one seems to notice that she has a certain upper torso development that would be considered a bit unusual for most boys! I am not even sure if Sam knows the truth. She calls the two of them "the Back Alley Princes".

Later the two of them become friends with some peddlers who all live in a communal apartment and the two move in as well. Angela Mao is the daughter of one of the peddlers and develops a minor crush on Polly! Angela's role is a secondary one – this was filmed before she had become a star - but she does manage to involve herself in three fights. The peddlers are very supportive of one another and finally for the first time Polly feels like she belongs to a family. Carter Wong also lives among them and has a good fight of his own. Helen Ma – another Kung Fu female fighter makes a cameo as the lawyer's girlfriend.

Thankfully not all is idyllic in this poor but caring community as a sleazy brothel owner (perennial villain Han Ying Chieh) attempts to steal two of the girls from the group and this leads to two excellent fights. On one occasion a gang of toughs tries to kidnap one of the girls and Polly and Angela rescue her and beat most of the men senseless with a flurry of kicks and punches. Later the two of them infiltrate the headquarters of the sleaze merchant by pretending they have been sold into prostitution (in which Polly has to disguise herself as a female!) and this leads to another excellent fight.

This was a very enjoyable film that takes the viewer on a trip through the streets and tenements of Hong Kong and takes you into the hearts of this makeshift family that you will come to care for. There is a sequel to this film called Chinatown Capers starring Polly and Sam that I look forward to seeing. By the way, Polly won the Golden Horse Best Actress award for her very personable performance in this film.

**Bandits From Shantung (Hong Kong, 1972: Huang Feng)** - Admirable simplicity from Golden Harvest that doesn't quite pan out but doesn't offend at below 80 minutes. Bandits are roaming the land and that includes a village where there's also treasure (most of the movie is set in this location). A lonely wanderer (Chang Yi) packing a mean sword stands up to the bandits (including Sammo Hung) and there you have it. Veteran GH director Wong Fung (Hap Ki Do) is no King Hu, nor is he a Sergio Leone when it comes to building tension through silences and static camera language. But eventually when the movie mixes the silence and the handful of various action set pieces, you have a tolerable to even classic mix as the action is outrageously furious and gory at points. Mixing styles evident in bashers and Wuxia movie trickery (Chang Yi literally pushes Sammo Hung into the ground at one point where vertically in the air himself), here's where the simplistic idea truly flourishes and Chang Yi and Pai Ying is effective, cool casting. Especially the more Wong Fung paints the frame in more and more blood (culminating in a bloodspurt that would equal a total of maybe 2 or 3 movies from the time).

**Bastard, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Chor Yuen)** - Chor Yuen crafts a typically thoughtful film taking the classic story 'The Man in the Iron Mask' as his inspiration.

Chung Wa is the naïve nameless 'bastard' of the title who believes he has found his father only to discover that he is an unwitting pawn in a sinister plot that threatens to make him the scapegoat for the murder of a government official. Lucky for him that he spent his formative years learning martial arts and is now a seemingly invincible kung fu master.

The more of Chor Yuen's work that I watch, the more it becomes clear that he placed as much importance on intelligent plotting as he did on creating captivating action scenes and 'The Bastard' is no exception. Both Chung Wa and Lily Li are given roles that they can really sink their teeth into, and they do. Lily Li, in a non action role as a beggar girl, almost steals the show with an incredibly spirited but touching performance and provides one side of a romantic triangle. Chung Wa gives his character and air of naivety and vulnerability despite the fact that he is more than capable of defending himself.

The film culminates in one of those early seventies style frantic free for alls where choreography is not so stylised but the action is incredibly captivating as the hero faces almost insurmountable odds. By the time the final showdown arrives Chor Yuen has been careful to load just the right amount of emotional content to really make the audience care about the outcome.

**Battle Wizard, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - During a short running time, some nonsense about revenge on the family (and specifically the son played by Danny Lee) that did wrong on the character Wong Po-yen acts as merely functional string for the carnival of high energy, special effects fun Pao Hsueh-Li orchestrates. Lee's Tuan Yu knows no martial arts and walks the world to find out if he's able to live in it sans the knowledge. Of course not and meeting up with a female snake master (Lam Jan-Kei - Tsui Hark's *Dangerous Encounter* - 1st Kind) leads to getting the power of the red python, encounters with mutants, gorillas, other energy bolt wielding villains and Tanny Tien (in an impressive action role) shooting laser daggers out of what looks like a dog bone. It's Wuxia fun with an emphasis on stepping it up technically and the colorful nature (literally and looking at the elements featured) elevates *The Battle Wizard*. Especially since it's a lean, simple experience too employing the very basic narrative techniques of the genre. Yet another movie of Danny Lee's at Shaw Brothers that stands out in the busy crowd (because the others were the likes of *The Oily Maniac*, *Mighty Peking Man* and *Inframan*) and while this part of his career didn't mean him finding his voice (various cop roles in the 80s made sure of that), Lee has a lot to be proud of as he was part of a studio trying their utmost to be versatile within sci-fi, horror, Japanese inspired tokusatsu entertainment and wild Wuxia style movies.

**Beach Of The War Gods (Hong Kong, 1973: Jimmy Wang Yu)** - The trailer didn't lie: it's a huge one. Starting out the way a Western would (a lonely stranger drops in a town with wind blowing and dust flying), it quickly cuts to action when Japanese drop in and the stranger battles them and make the remaining few run away. He later goes to recruit experts to train the population and so they can fight the Japanese on the nearby beach.

While the plot of Chinese resistance against Japanese oppressors may seem done to death, this film has a twist in that it's not just a bunch of MA-trained fighters that we see, but entire armies. And being a Wang Yu flick, we get our lot of colorful characters: a guy fighting with a pair of short spears, another one who uses a pair of shields (Captain China ?) and a knife-throwing mercenary who looks like some of those mexican dudes in Spaghetti Westerns for the good guys, a bunch of guys wearing strange masks beating drums during the battles in the Japanese army.

I couldn't believe that LITERALLY half the film was a giant battle in the little town, but it happened and it was very well-executed. The various weapons and some techniques (Reflecting technique, really ?!), the costumes and the planning of the battle are nice and creative, and the gore is pretty nice though a bit gruesome at time.

**Beautiful Swordsman, The (Taiwan, 1969: Yeung Siu)** - Trained assassin Yuan (Wong Ling) follows orders given by her tutor but this killing machine will learn the secret behind her past when a target is in her sight that has a family connection. A movie doesn't have to feature strong settings or costumes to stand out in the Wuxia genre. Somewhere in there director Yeung Siu knows this as the tragic story and fates are presented before us in clear, simple manner. But the melodramatic overdrive often hurts proceedings and clearly is a sign of lack of skill too. By no means bottom fodder, never does The Beautiful Swordsman turn into something valid in terms of its drama. The various killing techniques by what is a dual team of deadly women are fun but spread out, very sporadic pieces of flash.

**Beauty Escort (Taiwan, 1981: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - aka **Samurai Death Bells; Samurai Bells of Death** - In the wild and wacky world of chopsocky there are basically two varieties of flicks: The serious ones and the comedies. Although they're both often pretty funny, the looser comedies are usually the ones that hold up better. Humorless, overly serious flicks like, oh say Samurai Death Bells tend to grate quickly (unless they really spin off into the Ed Wood unintentional hilarity zone, in which case they're great) while the goofy caricatures and politically incorrect jokes of a film like Matching Escort can be endearing in a way.

The incomprehensible drama in Samurai Death Bells involves a lot of cliché clan mumbo-jumbo. Dragon is scheduled to fight Phoenix. Phoenix has died so Dragon will fight her student. (I appreciate the prominence of kick-ass female fighters in the film, if nothing else.) Off-screen, however, the new Phoenix apparently bests Dragon, leaving one of his sons to take over (skipping the obvious heir, thanks to his wimpiness.) The new Dragon, however, discovers that his father had been hiding a secret: He had been protecting a woman known as the Cold Blooded Mistress, an unpopular lass who was thought long dead but had been hiding in the false bottom of Dragon's coffin (which is apparently made of styrofoam.) Together they run around fighting lots of people (including Dragon's weirdly incestuous siblings) and doing all sorts of other nonsense.

What hurts Samurai Death Bells is the total lack of humor in the script and the cast. It's perhaps dumb to complain about this, but the film takes its idiotic plot so seriously that it leaves the viewer no room to enjoy. If the film relied on amazing fights that would be one thing, but they are largely sloppy and poorly filmed. The dialog is mostly creaky and stilted, which does lead to the occasional knee-slapper, such as "idiots like you I don't see often."

**Bells Of Death, The (Hong Kong, 1968: Griffin Yueh)** - One of those rare times when the revenge template within a kung fu movie or a Wuxia pian in the case of The Bells Of Death where the unfair feels hard, punishing and the subsequent revenge utterly primal as well. Chang Yi plays the sole survivor of a family victim of a random assault of violence by robbers. Learning martial arts quick and going to work, he also saves a prostitute (Chin Ping) but fears she might be too close to his needed cycle of violence. Chang Yi is excellent at embodying the hard, bloody face of revenge and the movie goes to town with gore as there's beheadings and limb choppings galore and all while it features the rare sight of more darkly colored blood in a Shaw Brothers movie! Someone went against the grain and made a batch of actual good looking movie blood here, something that fits well with the very de-colourized and earthy look of the film and The Bells Of Death is simply raw, violent, basic excellence.

**Best of Shaolin Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1976: Chan Siu Pang)** - Definitely one to stick on when you've got back from the pub on a Friday night. 'Best of Shaolin Kung Fu' might have a minimal plot but its an action packed fight fest well worth watching.

Cliff Lok plays a Ming patriot who discovers that the Ching emperor is really his brother and not a true Ching. He sets out to get the proof from the Shaolin temple but must pass a number of tests before he allowed access to secret documents. The first twenty minutes or so sets up this micro plot after which its nearly a full hour of action as Cliff Lok battles his way through the many challenges of Shaolin before finally taking on the emperor and his Ching soldiers. I can't say I've seen a kung fu film with so much fighting in before and this is classic stuff.

First Cliff Lok faces the 18 Lo Hans (18 Shaolin monks proficient in the Lo Han style) then he meets the four staff wielding members of the ten point club set. Next up its the Shaolin Rock Formation in a very original scene that takes place on the side of a cliff; the goal being for Cliff Lok to reach the top.

With the first stages over Cliff Lok has proven that he is worthy of a meeting with the high abbot who teaches him the twelve strikes of Tamo that he will need in the next stages of the challenge. The scene between Cliff Lok and Chan Siu Pang, as the abbot, is one of the real standout moments in the film, the other comes when Lok meets a troupe of three sectioned staff fighters.

When he has managed all of the challenges, and he goes through each of them looking as if he is going to lose at any moment, Lok is given the secret documents he needs.

The climax comes when Lok and his followers are ambushed by the emperor and his men, including henchman Carter Wong. After the intensity of the battles at Shaolin temple the final showdown here seems a little flat; in any other film it wouldn't.

I've not seen any other of Cliff Lok's films and found his style quite different to anything I've seen before. He may not be as graceful to watch as other exponents of kung fu cinema but he exudes natural ability and the fights in this movie carry more of a gritty realistic edge to them (in as much as seventies kung fu films can look realistic).

So, no storyline but great fighting and one film that I'll probably be watching again sometime soon.

**Betrayal and Revenge (People's Republic of China, 1986: Zhou Kangyu)** - My fourth Mainland Chinese film in one week and all I have to say, "Now, this is more like it!" After two mediocre kung fu movies, we get to one of the better examples of why people love Mainland movies so much: lots of beautiful Chinese landscapes and scenery on display, lots of fights (both group and individual), and an interesting historical plot.

Like the movie *The Warlords*, this movie is set during the Taiping Rebellion. The story isn't too hard to follow. Basically, most of the Taipings are slaughtered one night shortly after the passing of their emperor. A large group of them manage to escape, but are eventually attacked by the Qing army. The Taiping general is killed after he's betrayed by one of his fellow rebels. His son and a few others survive the conflict. The son is found by a loyal follower of the Taiping movement, who's also a supreme martial artist, and the son gets to hone his skills during the next several years. The son eventually meets up with another group of Taipings, including a girl he was friends with as a boy. They spend some time training together before launching a big attack on the Qing army and the traitor, who's now an official.

Before talking about the fights, there was one scene that really made me lift an eyebrow. You see, the Taipings were Christians right? Well, there's one scene where they slit a chicken's throat, pour its blood into some bowls, and drink it as part of a ritual. I immediately thought, "What kind of Christians are these?" I paused the movie and went to the Wikipedia to read more about them. Turns out that their sect of Christianity is generally considered to be somewhat heretical. Their leader considered himself to be the literal brother of Christ. He also had wrote or compiled other books of "scripture" as well. Interesting.

The fights were plentiful, and what they lack in weight is easily made up for by the volume. The choreography isn't very complex and, unlike the Hong Kong choreographers that worked on Mainland Chinese movies, the ones here are at a loss at how to give a good showcase to the individual styles featured in the film. However, there are lots of weapons on display, including razor rings, hoops, hammers, melon hammers, rakes(!), spears, swords, sabers, poles, throwing daggers, etc. The wushu on display is top-notch.

The last battle had some interesting tactics on display, including cannonballs filled with shrapnel, bees, children with blowguns full of acid, and goats with firecrackers tied to their tails that went mad when they exploded, causing them (the goats) to attack the Qings and bite them in their privates. I swear I'm not making that up.

**Big Boss, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Lo Wei)** – aka **Fists of Fury** - I first saw "The Big Boss" when I was about nine years old. My older cousin (who had introduced me to Lee a few years earlier) had given me a synopsis of the movie, and like him, I was genuinely enthralled. Unlike him, I hadn't experienced the Bruce Lee zeitgeist of the early 70's and, thus far, had only had real (reel) time with Lee in "Game of Death (1978)". For the better part of two years, I had idolized the Little Dragon mostly through photographs and because of this, he had taken on an additional mythical quality. As I slid in the videocassette, I remember a distinct feeling not too dissimilar to the one Indiana Jones must have felt upon finding the Holy Grail. I had lived with this film in my imagination for a child's eternity, and had a pretty good idea of what to expect. What I didn't know, was that the film itself would look and, more importantly,

feel almost exactly as it had in my mind. For this reason, among others, "Boss" will always be a little extra special to me.

Exactly what makes the movie so compelling? Unquestionably, it's the sheer magnitude of Lee's screen presence - a fact that prompted producer Raymond Chow to offer him the lead role initially intended for James Tien. Upon closer inspection, however, "Boss" possesses a primitive spontaneity and textural rawness that gives it an extremely tangible and visceral quality - a verisimilitude that's not unlike Tobe Hooper's "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" or Martin Scorsese's "Taxi Driver". From the moment Lee's character, the the mighty yet peaceful (or at least tries to be) Kung Fu master Cheng Chao-An, arrives at the Pak Chong dock, right through to the evocative finale where he's hauled off by Thai police, there's a certain sense of organic energy taking shape. This energy is both kinetic and alive. Cheng is a young Southern Chinese man with a troubled past. His newfound home offers an opportunity to seek his fortune through hard manual labor - a trade not uncommon to most Chinese expatriates - and, though never directly stated in the film, his pilgrimage was a result of his rebellious nature back home. Due to his new surroundings, Cheng's demeanor is both respectful and, oftentimes, painstakingly shy, but, there's an innate innocence to Cheng (represented by the jade locket given to him by his mother), and the more we spend time with him, we witness the gradual loss of that innocence. The set up works extremely well, as we don't see what Cheng is capable of till almost halfway into the film. Later, he'll come full circle, and embrace the bloodthirsty animal he sought to suppress - the destruction of everything Cheng held dear to him being cataclysmic for the emotional arc he will experience in his journey.

Particularly relevant is the way the violence is explored - uncompromisingly brutal, yet at the same time, strangely purifying. It's as if the violence serves as a confession, paving the way to Cheng's (and the viewer's) personal redemption. In the warehouse, bathed in eerie red light (that seemingly suggests the rage to come), Cheng discovers - much to his horror and heartbreak - his cousins' corpses. The flood lights switch on and we see: Cheng glaring at a group of Thai thugs approaching; lightning quick, he hurls his flashlight at one of them - impaling the metal through a man's skull. Using every weapon at his disposal - including a saw - he systematically chops through each man with what can be described as serene savagery. This Zen-like dispassion has two exceptions: the moment the jade locket is torn from his neck, and the final battle where he puts his fingers through Mi Hsiao's ribcage (as if striking the villain's pressure points and causing his organs to explode from the inside) and then proceeds to chain punch the villain's lifeless body to a pulp. If the broken locket represents the unleashing of the beast then the image of Cheng collapsing on top of the Mi's corpse is the exorcism of that beast.

Of particular interest is the music used throughout the film. The American/European dub uses a combination late 60's jazz and a synth/bass score- that at times conjure up the work of Chick Corea. Sparingly used throughout, the musical pieces not only increase the tension, but also add a surreal quality to the scenes - the overall effect being that of a sonic sculpture, taking on a life of it's own. Additionally, it connects the viewer to that primal element that lives throughout the piece. The score is at its best, however, in the finale showdown between Cheng and Mi. Consisting of little more than an off- rhythm, machine gun style bass line, punctuated by haunting synth lines and guitar twangs, it creates a vibrant urgency as the two opponents stare each other down and prepare to do battle.

Of particular interest is the major theme that separates "Boss" from not only Lee's own subsequent films, but martial arts movies in general: its use of sexuality for character development and driving the plot. Indeed, sex almost takes on its own character in the piece and abstractly mirrors the intensity of the violence. For the first **(and only)** time we see Lee sexually charged and uninhibited on celluloid. Eroticism runs through all of Cheng's relationships with women: borderline instinctual with his **(adopted)** cousin Chiao Mei, a flirtatious school boy crush with the girl at the ice stand **(Nora Miao)** and....promiscuous with local prostitutes, with whom Cheng enjoys two sexual encounters. Jimmy Wang Yu might've been the first kung fu star and the first hearthrob of women in Hong Kong, but even in The Chinese Boxer (1970), he was rather wooden. Lee, on the other hand, is presented as the nadir of Chinese masculinity: the female characters **(Both Chinese and Thai)** in Big Boss turn bashful in his presence. Cheng's first visit to the brothel**(in which he slept with the Thai beauty Malalene)** was a result of a drunken night out with the managers of the ice factory where he works **(seeking to isolate him from his co-workers)** But the original Mandarin print of the film included a mostly "lost" sequence of him returning to the brothel sober prior to his final confrontation with the Boss, whose factory is a front for a drugs ring.

In the deleted scene, Cheng, having made his decision to take vengeance, runs into the Pak Chong town and stops outside the town bordello. He pauses for a moment and, upon realizing the possibility of losing his life in the final battle, decides to enter the establishment. Inside, he pays some money to someone behind a counter, and goes upstairs to where the sex slaves are sitting. With Malalene nowhere to be seen, he picks a different prostitute in a red sweater-like dress **(who is actually visible in the background the second time Cheng visits the brothel, and whose face also bears a striking resemblance to Chiao Mei)**, and they go to the same room he had slept in two days prior. In direct contrast to his earlier encounter with Malalene, he's straightforwardly aggressive - the prostitute tries to flirt with Cheng, only to be roughly pushed onto the bed by him. He then takes off his shirt and

she removes her dress. They face each other; Cheng is standing naked behind the bed (**with a noticeably emotionless face**), while the prostitute smiles enthusiastically at him. She lies on the bed and Cheng (**waist-high shot**) walks toward the camera and blurs out the scene. Although no actual sexual activity is shown, it's fair to assume that Cheng was sexually passionate with the prostitute. After all, what he ultimately desired was intercourse without commitment and love without any strings attached. He would then slip out during the afternoon, crash the Boss's mansion, engage in his kill-all suicide mission, wash his hands and nobody would be the wiser.

Equally profound, is his departure from the room, specifically in the way he pays the prostitute for her service. Cheng is shown putting on his shirt, while the prostitute is still sleeping on the bed, with a well-satisfied expression on her face. While she's sleeping, Cheng takes out his remaining money, and lays it down on her stomach, even though he already paid to be with her. He does this since he realizes that he will not need it anymore if he dies, although it also hints that their lovemaking was one of mutual nurturing and entirely reciprocal, rather than just a fling designed solely for short-lived physical gratification. He also then sees a bag of prawn crackers and decides to take them as a "last meal". This explains why he has the crackers when he shows up at the boss' mansion.

There's a sensual gravitas and a prevalent solitude that linger as Cheng leaves the room. This scene is a prime example of why out of all of Lee's characters, Cheng Chao-an was the only one to truly change because of the course of events in the plot. While the likes of Chen Zhen and Tang Lung are likable for their own reasons, they all merely turn into more magnified versions of how they started at the beginning of their respective movies, rather than a full change. Cheng, however, starts off as a pretty mellow and shy introvert who awkwardly steals glances at Maria Yi, and wishes nothing more than to live peacefully. Keeping this scene in the movie would have made it even better because it shows that the protagonist has turned hard for the final event, and it also serves as a pivotal moment of Cheng's human development. You have him throwing away his stuff (**Burying his past life with no intention of re-visiting it**), indulging in his final pleasures as a free man with a lady of the night (**Emerging from the cocoon of his former self and embracing his new path as a warrior**), and then grabbing a chip bag from the room's table for his last supper (**An acknowledgement of his own mortality**). It makes the final sequence all the more poignant, and it's complete absence along with other cuts (**more on that in a bit**), as the nonchalance with which Cheng is eating a packet of crackers as he arrives in the mansion's gate just jars very badly with the previous scene (**riverside mourning**) in the current edit.

In spite of all of this, a shred of his previous gentle nature still survives within him, as shown in the very last portion of the movie: Although he defeats the Boss, Cheng still tries to get himself killed by the police, thinking that there was no more joy left for him in life, but he quickly relents when Chiao Mei, who is alive and well, pleads for him to surrender peacefully. He looks up, as if finally conscious of his situation for the first time since pondering over his grief and heartbreak at the river, and he raises his bloodstained hands to be detained. Cheng has avenged his family, but he now sees himself bound, caged, defeated, both literally and spiritually wise, treated like a chained beast. Chiao Mei sobs at Cheng's chest, not knowing that his body is stained with another woman's essence, and he is powerless to do anything other than to simply comfort her by saying "It's okay, Mei".

Cheng and Chiao Mei walk together arm in arm toward the police car, suggesting that regardless of what will immediately happen to them next the couple will enter the future together, and they will rely on each other's companionship. Mei has demonstrated she is more than willing to look past and accept Cheng's flaws as a human being, especially his infidelity at the brothel, and assist him in dealing with his vices and inner demons so that they can build a new life together, and along with it a new family that will replace the loved ones they have just lost. The film thereby ends in a bittersweet, if not still uncertain note, and it's left to the viewer's imagination whether Cheng will revert back to his previous lifestyle as a country bumpkin who is dedicated to his friends and community, or remain committed to his hedonistic anti-heroic brawler with no further ambitions beyond enjoying life's pleasures to it's fullest.

Quite a lot of material was clipped from the version we know today, including a particularly poignant scene that foreshadows Cheng's eventual path: immediately following the roadside skirmish with the casino locals, Hsu Chien and Cheng continue down the road, making their way home. They detour through an alleyway and find themselves besieged by the same group of thugs, who proceed to push a burning rickshaw cart towards them. They narrowly escape by leaping over a wall in unison; Hsu turns to Cheng and comments on the lengths men will go to obtain vengeance - subconsciously informing our hero of his own destiny.

Like the brothel scene, the omission of the burning cart sequence and others only ensue that the continuity and character study suffer. All things withstanding, "Boss" is by no means flawless. As is true of most Hong Kong film productions of the period, it was shot on a less than shoestring budget, and it shows. Continuity is ignored (**The result of a messy production and a script that was continuously being worked on as filming progressed**), the dubbing (**English and otherwise**) is abysmal and, at times, the film negatives appears damaged. Additionally, Lo

Wei's direction occasionally falters into hokey chop socky scenarios, including a comical shot of Lee punching a thug through a warehouse wall-leaving the outline of the man's body on the wood.

The saving grace is Lee's superb combat choreography - which, to this day, is still as profound and resonant as it was back in 1971. For all the reported tension between Lee and Wei, it's noteworthy that, in an early letter to his wife, Lee would write: "The shooting is picking up steam and moving along much better than it was. The new director is no Roman Polanski, but as a whole he is a much better choice than our ex-director." Lee was referring to the original director, Wu Chia-Hsiang, who was fired a few days into shooting, for both going over budget and having a lackadaisical attitude on the set. The Big Boss project suffered as a result of this director's incompetence and subsequent departure, as Lo Wei joined the boat midway through production and was forced to work around the first 1/3 of the filming that had already been completed. It is without a doubt that, had Lo Wei been at the helm from the beginning, Big Boss would've been far more consistent plot-wise.

Despite all this, and its modification on the generic revenge theme used in most martial art films, "Boss" echoes a pagan spirit. Essentially, it gives Lee a vehicle to create the classic Nietzschean überman he sought to present himself as to the world. Consider the set up for the final battle: Cheng leaps over the tall metal fence. With his jacket slung over his shoulder and a bag of prawn crackers(**which he continuously munches on**), he is an image straight out of western mythology. He is the gunslinger coming back to seek retribution. Through this, he fulfills a self imposed purpose and, metamorphoses now complete, he becomes the quintessential archetype. As Nietzsche wrote: "the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally a child." In many ways, "Boss" is an old fashioned story told in a conventional way. It succeeds, despite its failings, because it exhibits an internal consistency that other genre films lack. Operatic in nature, with a distinct thematic honesty, "Boss" emphasizes self-reflection, innocence, fatefulness, coming of age and redemption.

This was Lee's debut in a leading role, and it's consistently his best acting. Gone is the apparent self consciousness that dominated his role in the "Longstreet" television pilot (**shot only a few months earlier**) and replacing it is a more subtle moment to moment performance that's become the staple of western cinema. In fact, it's his most Western performance in his most Eastern film - due to Lee not having yet fully committed himself to the Asian style of representational acting. Lee's looks also played a pivotal role in his appeal: his appearance belied his 30 years of age, making him look almost ten years younger. His Beatles-esque hairstyle was very distinct in his own way; simple, rich of movement, and it made him look boyish and manly at the same time. Lee definitely had an aura radiating a strong James Dean quality to him, but it's fair to say he was certainly underrated as an actor.

"Boss" gives us a taste of Lee's dramatic capabilities. Most revealing is a moment that occurs towards the finale: Cheng sits by the river stream, contemplating his past and the inner pain of his soul. As the camera slowly moves in on his face, we see Bruce Lee look up to the sky, prophetically catching a glimpse of the future - the ascension of his star and, ultimately, his own (im)mortality.

**Big Boss of Shanghai (Taiwan, 1979: Chen Kwan Tai)** - Chen Kwan Tai directs this excellent 'brotherhood and betrayal' kung fu drama which seems highly influenced by his previous starring role in the classic 'Boxer From Shantung'. Like that movie it tells the story of a penniless new arrival in the big city who fights back against the exploitation of workers by gangsters and soon rises through the ranks of the triad; taking control of territories and gaining influence.

The former Shaw's star is joined by Jimmy Lee and while Chen Kwan Tai keeps to his morals and sense of righteousness his partner is seduced by the dark side. None too happy about the new troublemakers in town taking his profits, gang overlord Chen Sing seeks to use the growing friction between the two friends to his own advantage.

The film is made on a much lower budget than 'Boxer' but sets and costumes are adequate to recreate Shanghai of the 1930's; a time when the city was split into sectors governed by foreign powers. There are times when external locations seem a little modern but nothing that upsets the ambience too much. The drama is engaging and effectively loads the film with emotional content that gives the final showdown such an impact.

The action is well choreographed and comes at regular intervals throughout the film building to an explosive climax which echoes the final showdown from 'Boxer From Shantung'. It's not as bloody but better arranged as choreography styles had moved on by that time. A great performance from Chen Kwan Tai, and from co-star Jimmy Lee, and a great kung fu movie.

**Big Boss Part 2, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Chan Chue)** - Mystery and intrigue is not exclusive to the martial arts movie genre collector but it certainly seems to have latched on to it pretty well. All any internet savvy person need do is google "Game of Death lost footage" and you will spend days fishing through the forums, blogs and articles on how many more pagoda floors "really" exists in the truncated Lee classic. Every fame seeking, trouble stirring, basement dwelling Internet geek has claimed to have seen it, heard it or is really good friends with the guy that has. And this massive time consuming discussion does not stop with Game of Death. In fact, one could argue that a close runner-up to this Holy Grail of forum fodder is another Bruce Lee film.

Sort of.

The Big Boss Part II is not really a Bruce Lee film. In fact, it's not one at all. But it is a prime example of what gives the genre of Bruceploitation films some of their biggest appeal: Celluloid Bruce Lee Conjectures. These are the stories and films Bruce Lee may have taken his lethal personality into had he lived longer. Would Enter The Dragon have continued with Return to Han Island? Would Bruce have paired up with Bolo for a cop buddy film? In many cases, these maligned productions contain actors, locations and potentially even Bruce Lee footage which would attract their audience to the theaters or videos stores in droves. And this conspicuous pursuit has only added to the films' charms today.

Where one era ends, the next begins. The Big Boss Part II in a pre-Game of Death strategy, opens on a tricky edit of the finale' of The Big Boss.

The Big Boss Part II (not to be confused with the Dragon Lee oddity, Big Boss 2) today in 2018 continues among genre fans to be a bit of a mystery, with legends about elusive 35mm prints hidden in South Africa film vaults, bonus Bruce Lee footage, etc. adding to the movie's status. Its story lines as well as performers still lingering enigmas to even the longest adoring fans. You can look online under film databases and find that many, if any at all, don't even include the film's director as one of the main players (more on that ahead). The only reference of study today is a truncated dubbed clip on youtube of the first 16 minutes (lasting only 10 minutes) and an original trailer showcasing tempting tid bits of the action. Bruceploitation fans generally note this film as the celluloid birth of one of the genre's tentpoles Bruce Le, but can only guess if the future leading actor ever breaks from his cement prison to join the star Lo Lieh in the film's action.

As a lucky kid (Becoming a "Bruceploitation "collector long before it was coined a term) and now as an adult, I have had the opportunity to see this film a number of times. I can attest to its actual existence (and yes, it still exists in its 35mm celluloid form fortunately) as well as comment on if this elusive film lives up to the legacy that has followed it through its decades long absence.

Well in a nutshell, the Bruce Lee-action hungry kid enjoyed this (admittedly somewhat sluggish) film when I first saw it. But over the years as I became a student of film, gravitating towards the mysterious Antonioni or the emotionally subdued Ozu, I allowed the film's many cinematic shortcomings to darken my view of it. The snobby cinephile turned his back on the kung fu film fan of youth. But then something happened over the last few years. As I began a personal crusade to recover as many of these quickly fading 35mm martial arts film prints out of Taiwan and Hong Kong as possible, I revisited the movie in its historical context to both Bruce Lee and the "after Bruce Lee" decade and re-developed an appreciation and like for the film. No, it did not suddenly become the lost classic we may have all hoped for but through the looking glass of Kung Fu/Bruce Lee/Bruceploitation history, this film serves as a archival transition through the melee' of movies after the passing of the King of Kung Fu.

I first became aware of the sequel to Bruce Lee's first film The Big Boss in an issue of the pioneer Martial Arts Movies Magazine. As a book-carrying pre-teen martial arts cinema fan, and as possibly the world's first ardent devotee of Bruce Lee exploitation, the rapture took place when I discovered Daniel C. Lee's article on the phenomena (I recently read a publication from a number of years ago dealing with Bruce Li which plagiarized this article in part – so I want to give a shout out here to Daniel for being the first!). After learning of the film, I began a journey to hit up every Chinese video store in the greater San Francisco area until I finally one day walked into a small shop on Mission Street and uncovered the clamshell bootlegged Video box that I had been searching for. The Big Boss Part II, written on a plain white spine, a generic image of Bruce Lee copied to the cover, this "paper bagged" cinema gem could not have looked better .

I rented the film for their standard 48 hours period and, now a reluctant admission, used a second rental VCR to copy the film for lifetime viewings. This was the era of VCRs the size of hybrid Hyundais so this archaic duping operation of mine took up the length of my bedroom, but I could now add this to my small but growing bootleg of



bootlegs collection of precious Kung Fu films. This particular Bruce Lee sequel, of a much more official capacity than any other Bruceploitation follow up (Fist of Fury 2, Growling Tiger, Tower of Death, etc., all contending production companies flying under the radar) , was rivaled only by Lo Wei's New Fist of Fury.

I lost that valuable VHS years later and once I realized it was like losing the Hope Diamond, I set out to find it again. I followed every story that even smelled like it might be true (we all know the attention seekers online can spin a pretty tempting web). But while traveling over seas and perusing the archives for several documentaries I am working on, I managed to get right to the horses mouth and pull back the curtains of Kung Fu Oz and find my way back to "The Little Boss" after tracking down a rare print.

I go into depth on the film's cinematic contributions in my forthcoming book, but I will tackle some of the film elements here. Directed by the original Big Boss' actor and assistant director, Chan Chue, he would return once again as the factory boss, a role that became a mainstay for the actor/director's career. Sharp eyed Bruce Lee fans would note him playing himself as both the character and as the assistant director (confused yet?) from the original film in the Bruce Li classic, Bruce Lee The Man The Myth (Bruce Lee- True Story) when Li (as Lee) shoots The Big Boss in Thailand. But Chan returns in Part II to essentially inherit the role of Han Ying-Chieh (The Boss) from the first film. Being director has it's advantages! But even to an eleven year old Kung Fu fan, I realized this connecting tissue to a Bruce Lee film made the film that much more valuable.

The film opens immediately on a wide shot of Cheng (Lee) and the Boss (Han Ying-Chieh) circling each other from the finale' of The Big Boss, unceremoniously picking right up from the first film. We are wide over Lee's back, a cinematic technique used in the credit sequence avoiding Lee's face to either make room for Bruce Le or to avoid a lawsuit. The next pair of images are two very tight shots (think spaghetti western) of the supposed Boss and Cheng, but interestingly enough, the Cheng character is not Bruce Le but another actor altogether. These two "stunt doubles" for Lee and Chieh intercut briefly through the credits with the original Boss footage before the police arrive and sweep "Lee" off to Jail.

The following shot is in prison, a close up of what is apparently our "bad guy's" face that has been drawn on a prison wall. As the camera zooms out, the third incarnation of Cheng Chou An within a three minute span runs up and does a jump side kick at the wall. After a rapid burst of punches only stopping short of destroying his knuckles on the brick wall, we get a reverse shot and finally get our first look at the soon to be dubbed Bruce Le. His fist clenched high in frame, eyes glaring at his art work of a cell mate, he utters the first lines in the film:

"You! Just see how long you can get away from me"

This moment is an interesting one historically as we have the transition of supporting actor Huang Kin-Lung into one third of the famous Bruceploitation trinity, Bruce Le. Here, actually playing a "Bruce Lee character", he is billed by his real name, and only later that same year in Bruce's Deadly Fingers, starring along side several of his Big Boss Part II actors, will he inherit that more memorable moniker for the rest of his career.

Le's role is the torch bearer in this case, bridging the gap between Bruce Lee and those that will come next, in this case Lo Lieh. One might think with a set up of a popular Bruce Lee character that he would be used to full bone crushing advantage, but for one reason or another, Le's pent up fury is not unleashed in this story and instead he is left unceremoniously behind bars in the film's first act. The titular "Boss" of these films traditionally is thought of as the main villain, but the actual reference is to the Bruce Lee character, the "big brother", or the "big boss" here left to rot in a Thailand cell.

Later in the story, when Lo Lieh shows up to visit his brother (Le) in jail, the Chinese version of the film has Bruce Le commenting out loud that he has been in the prison for "years", setting this film clearly much later than the original. There are story lines here as well more convoluted than any soap opera that twist this time frame even further, but will leave that for another day. The first real action scene doesn't even take place until about 20 minutes into the film, and plays like some Game of Death homage as Lo Lieh makes his way up the stairs of a gambling casino fighting different opponents on various floors. There are some near moments of greatness as several long takes, following the choreography up the stairs, hint towards besting Old Boy and Ong Bak 2 by several decades.

Shot by Law Wan-Shing, who lensed the superior looking Executioners From Shaolin the next year, the aggressive wide angle hand held camera works pretty well with the wide chop-and-block choreography, giving most of the fights a brutal authenticity. This sequence (one of the better in the film) ends in one of the worst segue ways into a love scene you will ever see, but one thing becomes clear and that is that "torch" has definitely been dropped earlier in the relay race. Lo Lieh has some impressive action films in his career (Executioners of Shaolin, King Boxer,

etc.) and is clearly not a frail actor, but the flair and precision and explosiveness that Bruce Lee brought to the ice factories of Thailand has thawed somewhat. And in there sometimes lies the emotional conflict in watching these films. Digging through Bruceploitation for the residue of Bruce Lee we more often than not end up noting the measure of his absence instead.

The film veers off into odd territory as multiple convenient circumstances leads Lieh through a series of ordeals while he helps look for a mysterious cache of gold. It would be too easy to write a blog punching holes in the writing here, but safe to say the thread of tension and cohesiveness has been cut early on by one of Lieh's Karate chops. In the space filler second act, we have: Characters walking up out of nowhere, protracted slow motion romantic running, Lo Lieh and girlfriend holding their breath underwater for 5 minutes while fighting alligators and humans, exploding snake booby traps and an unexplained exploding house. Chue tries to follow up the original with some James Bond influenced action (yes, the 007 theme even makes it's way into the film) but the fragmented editing minimizes most of what probably looked great on paper. Much of this feels like the bravado trying to fill the hole left by the most obvious missing piece of the story: Bruce Lee.

The young Bruce Lee starved film fan in me was ecstatic to see some of the original locations return for this sequel. Somehow, regardless of all else, that helped legitimize the film's existence. Any loose kinship to "the man, the myth" in Bruceploitation makes the film a more desirable viewing. The finale takes place at the same ice factory location in the original film between Lo Lieh and the only surviving member of the first film, Chue. At this point, (Michael) Chan Wai-Man makes what amounts to be a 10 minute cameo (though he is billed third in the opening credits) for a fight with Lo Lieh (his demise spoiled on the original film poster). In some more clever editing, Chan's appearance supposedly taking place at the ice factory, looks to have been filmed elsewhere, maybe even Hong Kong. But these two, wherever they are, give a good sequence of bash and chop choreography. And the sequence also shows that within Bruceploitation, Boss Part II is one of the few examples where Lee's choreography and fighting style was not a staple of the film's construction.

The filmmaking here can be lazy (the camera catches the crew in a mirror in one shot), the story is clunky (Lo Lieh finds what appears to be a man with a knife in his back who hands Lieh a letter to deliver and Lieh just asks "Oh, what are you going to do?" before going off to deliver the letter) and the fights can be messy at times (Yuen Cheung-Yan of the famous Yuen clan clearly phoned some of this in) but in truth, this is all part of the experience. The fact that the soundtrack swipes "Purple Haze" from Jimi Hendrix, burying it into the score is only part of the fun of these films and why we sometimes seek them out.

This may not be the martial arts masterpiece it could have been following on the heels of Lee's debut martial arts feature, but the somewhat messy and odd arrangement of characters, fight sequences and story lines still fulfills that other yearning of many of us. The cinematic legacy of Bruce Lee, like the nebulous arrangement of his art Jeet Kune Do, was left to many admirers, martial artists and shrewd producers to try and maintain. In the decade or so following, through the many cinema visionaries and snake oil salesmen, we got some of the more memorable and lasting martial arts films, for better or for worse, that offered us the interpretations and re-imaginings of a screen legend. And the rare and nomadic production of The Big Boss Part II certainly lives up to that legacy of conjecture we have all come to love.

**Big Boss II, The (Hong Kong, 1981: To Man-Bu; Lee Eun) – aka Dragon Lee Fights Again; Dragon Bruce Lee, Part II; Chinese Goliath** - This is probably one of Dragon Lee's most tolerable movies, probably because it's not dubbed by Vaughan Savidge!

In general, the few co-productions Lee worked on are ok, as they tend to feature slightly (I stress slightly) better production values, better casts, MUCH better sound FX, and well, the plots are at least about something important. This film is about the resistance against the Japanese, *Golden Dragon*, *Silver Snake* is about a flippin farm!!!

Interestingly, on the English dub anyway, two clips from *Last Fist of Fury* and *Clones of Bruce Lee* are spliced in, including the music (Gonna Fly Now!!!) and sound FX from those two productions. This would carry over into the Asso Asia acquired Dragon Lee movies.

Besides Ko Fei, Bolo, Cheung Nik and To Bai Bo, the vast majority of the cast seems to be Korean. Very little attempt is made at making this actually look like China - a lot of the actresses wear those terrible Korean dresses that suggest an abnormally large pregnancy.

**Big Family, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Steve Chan Ho) - aka Last Challenge of the Dragon; Wu Tang Gambinos** - Steve Chan Ho directs and stars in this crime/family/kung fu drama. He plays one of the sons of the family. A drug addicted idiot who somehow manages to be the least interesting character. Sek Kin brilliantly plays the head of the family. His other 2 main sons are played by Yen Shi Kwan and Nick Cheung aka Cheung Nik (I never know what to call this guy). He also has a playful daughter.

This is more of a drama than a kung fu movie and while it's not boring, it never gets very interesting. The good school vs bad school plot from countless kung fu movies is replaced with good family vs bad family. Sek Kin is a great actor and his relationship with his sons kept me from pressing the fast forward button. My favorite character is Yen Shi Kwan. He loves boxing and guns. He's a funny guy and has a good heart, but don't piss him off.

There's not much fighting in this movie but things get off to a good start with Bolo vs Nick Cheung. These 2 had worked together at least a couple times before and they have a good rhythm. It's a good fight but it never gets exciting. You may be thinking that if Bolo and Nick Cheung are in a movie together then San Kuai will probably show up too. And you're right. San Kuai has a quick cameo fight against Bolo. The next couple of fights are group fights. It's not bad but this is standard stuff. You have to wait awhile for the next fight scene which is the finale. And you don't want to miss it.

Karate master Luk Chuen is hired to fight Sek Kin's family for the final fight. It starts out really good with Nick Cheung vs Luk Chuen and then it gets even better when Yen Shi Kwan and Sek Kin get in on the action. Luk Chuen and his final opponent go at it hard and there's some real hate going on in this brawl.

**Big Fight, The (Taiwan, 1972: Sun Ting-Mei, Sun Sheng-Yuan) - Aka: Blood on the Sun; World War of Kung Fu; Combate de Dragões** - The story is pretty typical early 70s anti-Japanese rigmarole. The Japanese are occupying Northern China and routinely beat people to death at checkpoints, while the Chinese who suck up to them aren't much better. We follow the exploits of Chou Hai-Chuen (Roc Tien), a laborer and kung fu instructor who doesn't think very highly of the Japanese. After murdering a squad of Japanese soldiers, he gets involved with a rebel movement led by Miss Liao (Cheung Ching-Ching of *Kung Fu Mama*). They head back to his hometown, where his senior brother and general sleaze, Brother Wu (Kwan Yung), is acting like he owns the place because his dad is the mayor and a Japanese supporter. Chou doesn't agree with Wu's attitude, but is willing to bide his time for the moment. Wu eventually has Chou Hai-Chuen thrown in prison for possession of salt (apparently a component of gunpowder), but is released at the request of Brother Wu's current kung fu teacher (Cheung Siu-Kwan). Brother Wu then suggests to his Japanese superiors that they throw a tournament to "promote friendly relations," but in actuality to kill off any kung fu master who may join the rebel movement in the future. Chou Hai-Chuen initially resists getting involved, but a series of violent tragedies eventually pushes him over the age.

Man, this was one violent and brutal film. Limbs are broken. Chests are caved in. Spinal cords are snapped in half. Little children take death palms to the face and die in bloody heaps. Our heroes kill one Japanese sympathizer by strangling him with barb wire. Dozens of people (on both sides) are hacked to pieces with katana blades or mowed down with rifles. About a whole hogshead of blood was spent just for people to spit up. And just to keep things sleazy, no fewer than four women get raped over the course of the film, though thankfully the movie fades to black before we get to see the deed done. One rape scene actually ends with the victim burying a pair of scissors in the assailant's back before shooting herself in the stomach. I'm not sure if this is the most violent basher of the time period, but it's certainly up there.

The action is quite frequent and generally solid for something made in 1972. Cheung Ching-Ching more or less steals the show as the Taiwanese answer (at the time) to Angela Mao, who exudes confidence as she karate chops all of her opponents into oblivion, including the oversized Cheng Fu-Hung (*Guy with Secret Kung Fu*), who plays a sumo wrestler. Cheung also has the film's most unique weapon, a skirt covered on one side with razor-sharp metal discs that she lashes out at her opponents. Not far behind is Cheung Siu-Kwan, who plays the benevolent kung fu master and spars with the Japanese judo and karate (Ng Tung-Kiu and Hsieh Hsing, respectively) masters during the tournament sequences. His fight feels like a proto-shapes duel and is one of the highlights of the movie. Look fast for a young Jack Long and Choi Wang as tournament participants. The former looks especially acrobatic compared to his co-stars, and should've been given more room to shine. Also, there are two large-scale massacres in the final act where dozens of people are torn to pieces with swords, knives and fisticuffs, which should make some fans happy.

Let's talk about the movie's resident tough guy: Roc Tien. Uh...He's not very impressive in this, even though he's supposedly the most talented fighter in the film. His kicks don't get any height and his handwork is nondescript. He frequently uses knives in his fights and is often saved from death because of hidden trampolines and "bionic legs." Or in other words, he's essentially a less-ugly version of Jimmy Wang Yu. I imagine this movie was made early enough that the action director and cast were still getting a hold of this new kung fu genre, so maybe it's not completely Tien's fault. But the fact of the matter is that he's far from the most interesting character to watch during the fight scenes. Thankfully, there are so many fights that don't feature him during the second half that his lack of martial charisma doesn't detract from the rest of the movie. Now the brutality and misogyny, that may be another story...

**Big Rascal, The (Taiwan, 1979: Chi Kwan Chun)** - Chi Kwan Chun takes the helm as star, director and action choreographer with impressive results. This is one of those films where plot serves as a device to simply move from one fight scene to the next but is well developed enough to maintain interest.

Chi Kwan Chun plays a coolie who manages to rise through the ranks of the triad due his proficiency in kung fu. However he unwittingly becomes the tool of his masters to wipe out their opponents. While Chi Kwan Chun may seem invincible he has an Achilles heel in the form of his far less capable brother.

Expectedly Chi Kwan Chun takes centre stage in the fighting, his solid forms have rarely looked more impressive, but there is a diverse range of fighting styles on display. The main star's moves, based on real kung fu techniques, are contrasted nicely by the more flowery style of the female lead. If the film has a fault it's the lack of a really formidable villain however the final showdown is still accomplished with choreography that is crisp and fast flowing.

**Black and White Umbrellas (Hong Kong, 1971: But Fu)** - The movie begins with the chiefs of White Umbrella clan and Black Umbrella clan fighting with each other and they kill each other. Before dying, the Chief of the White Umbrella clan tells his son that he doesn't want the two clans to fight anymore and that he'll have to get rid of the enmity between the two clans in the future and the chief's son of the Black Umbrella clan swears that he'll take revenge on the White Umbrella clan.

When he is a man, he kills Pan Ying Zi's uncle, who was related to the White Umbrella clan, he kidnaps, rapes and kills the chief's of the White Umbrella clan wife and almost kills this one. Badly hurt, the chief of the White Umbrella clan is cured by a woman and her daughter (Suen Ga Lam) who is a singer, with Pan Ying Zi's help.

Pan Ying Zi discovers that the chief of the Black Umbrella clan has taken the control of Tian Nan fortress and has recruited more great fighters in order to get rid of his enemy and also of a government official who is on his way to Tian Nan in order to get rid of the bandits. Pan Ying Zi and the chief of the White Umbrella clan then decide to save the official and to get rid of the chief of the Black Umbrella clan. A very good and not very known movie, with good fights, particularly from Pan Ying Zi, and a very good plot. Worth watching.

**Black Belt (Hong Kong, 1973: Cheung Sum)** - A young man meets a man and his daughter who are fighting against the Chinese who are working for the Japanese, he helps them and the man teaches him some more martial arts. Then, he arrives in a city where all the men are caught by the Japanese and treated as slaves in their mine and he helps Chiang Ming and his two sisters, impersonating Chiang Ming (who is ill and can't work) in order to work in the mine. There, he witnesses how the Japanese are cruel, he fights them and escapes.

He is caught by a rich Chinese who is the "dog" of the Japanese chief and he discovers that this Chinese's wife is his mother (she was kidnapped when he was a little boy and his father had been murdered) and that the Chinese is his father's murderer. Finally, helped by the man of the beginning of the movie and his daughter and by a Cantonese who is very strong, he succeeds in taking revenge for his parents. This is a good movie with good fights, but I think that there are some missing scenes which don't explain how the man and his daughter arrived in the village where lives Chiang Ming and how they are involved in the struggle against the Japanese, and also, we don't know how the Cantonese who saves the hero's life twice is related to the plot. The movie is still worth watching, however.

**Black Belt Karate (Hong Kong, 1977: Shih Ah Fu)** - I must admit I was expecting more from a film with Larry Lee, Bruce Liang, Billy Chong and Lo Lieh. The premise has all the makings of a classic (rival martial arts schools at war) but the filmmakers fail to produce anything that actually engages.

Larry Lee travels to Indonesia to find his uncle but instead joins the 'Black Eagle' karate school. After initially being forced to do chores around the place he eventually is allowed to train and rises to the top of the class. This makes him an instant rival to the elder student who joins a rival school and brings all sorts of trouble the 'Black Eagles' way. A short trip to Hong Kong earns Larry, or Tommy as his character is called, his 5th level black belt after which he returns to Thailand to take on his rivals and their champion fighter played by Lo Lieh.

There's no shortage of fight scenes in this but they all seem to be rather sterile affairs with no sense of tension. Technical ability isn't an issue, especially not with the likes of Larry Lee, Billy Chong and Bruce Liang doing their stuff, but it's just missing something. Possibly its down to the rather rigid choreography based around traditional karate moves but its also the fact that the sense of energy and spectacle seen in so many seventies kung fu flicks is just missing here. Incidentally, the lion's share of screen time is taken by Larry Lee with cameo appearances from the other top names although Bruce Liang's is the best fight sequence of the whole film.

**Black Butterfly, The (Hong Kong, 1968: Lo Wei)** - Moving Chor Yuen's *The Black Rose* (1965) into period territory and into Lo Wei's hands, now the story of a masked female warrior (Chiao Chiao - One Armed Swordsman) acting in the interest of the poor people is a snoozefest. And I'm not surprised it's Lo Wei managed to evoke that. Simple enough yet still not coming through most of the time with even basic storytelling, it's not easy to turn off and just enjoy basic conflict either when the action is slow and even embarrassingly sloppy at points. Not a good trademark coming from Shaw Brothers and although the look and design is as gorgeous as ever, *The Black Butterfly* is an all round failure. Lo Wei himself appear in support. As does Yueh Hua, Tien Feng (the standout performer here), Ku Feng, Chen Hung-Lieh and Yeung Chi-Hing as the drunken beggar with a secret.

**Black Dragon's Revenge, The (Hong Kong, 1975: Tony Liu Chun-Ku) - a.k.a The Death Of Bruce Lee** - The most feared man in America *The Black Dragon* (Ron Van Clief), is hired to find out the truth behind Bruce Lee's death. He goes to Hong Kong and meets his old war buddy Charlie (Charles Bonet), the pair leave no stone unturned in their quest for the truth.

*"He who has seen little, admires much"*

Action packed sequel to the *Black Dragon* (1974), with the tough and talented Ron Van Clief returning to his most well known role. Filmed almost entirely in Hong Kong, the movie is like an alternative 1970's guide to the island's city and its maze of back alleys and hide outs. There's also some very groovy looking fashion on display with our star donning some eye catching clothes. Ron Van Clief might just be the only man who can look cool while sporting a colourful knitted sleeveless jumper?. While the movie may not feature any Bruce Lee clones, it certainly belongs in the Bruceploitation genre. The plot is very similar to *Exit The Dragon Enter The Tiger* (1976), only it's the black dragon kicking ass and taking names instead of Ho Chung Tao.

Ron Van Clief was certainly an accomplished Martial Arts in his own right. While this movie clearly tries to cash in on the Little Dragon craze of the mid-70's. The star doesn't come across like a poor man's Bruce Lee, or attempt to copy his famous mannerisms such as the finger swipe over the nose. The movie starts with shots of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where the Little Dragon was pronounced dead by doctors on the 20th of July 1973. We then cut to San Francisco where the black dragon is hired by a mysterious Chinese man played by Bobby Canavaro (*The Dragon Lives Again*). Then it cuts to a plane landing in Hong Kong, where the action really starts to kick off.

The film features an ensemble of fight choreographers who all have roles onscreen. Chan Lau (*The Dragon, The Hero*) who normally plays eccentric villains actually plays one of the good guys for a change. Here he plays an old Master who spends most of his time spouting out Eastern philosophy and wisdom. With so many people contributing to the action it's hard to credit any one person for the finished product. Jason Pia Piao (*Funny Kung Fu*) and Ang Saan (*Stranger From Canton*), were also part of the team contributing to the Martial Arts content. The fighting on display is of a good standard, with some really nice stand out moves by various cast members. However it's not special enough to really make it stand out among the many other movies made that year. The old basher style was starting to fade out at this point, but you can still see its influence here. A lot of the moves are basic strong

blocks and blows and with some fancy boot work thrown in too. We also get treated to some weapons use with tonfas, sais, nunchaku and plenty of the trusty old lead piping.

One stand out sequence see's the black dragon and his friend Charlie face off against a gang of armed thugs on a hillside road. Hong Kong veteran actor San Kui (*Ten Magnificent Killers*) turns up here and can be spotted in a minor role throughout most of the films run time. Roy Horan's one armed assistant from *Tower Of Death* To Wai-Wo, can also be spotted briefly wielding a pair of chain sticks. The Latin Panther Charles Bonet shows that he clearly had the skills to be a good screen Martial Artist. He was a friend of Ron's in real life and the two actually met in the army, just like their on-screen characters. Here he shows off some nice kicks and is a welcome presence among the cast. Unfortunately he only ever appeared in a handful of movies in his short career. He was nicknamed the Latin Panther with a 8th-dan in Nisei Goju-Karate and an 6th-dan in Shorin-Ryu Karate.

Most of the action is of the same standard throughout. It might not be done in the most intricate or elaborate way, but it's still entertaining to watch. Ron Van Clief has his own powerful looking screen fighting style, that's all his own. It's interesting to see how they integrated his skills into the Hong Kong style of action movie making. He looks much better and more relaxed here than in the first movie. According to the man himself he was allowed much greater freedom/input, in terms of the fights staged for this sequel. We also get to see him show of his skills with the double sai during an impressive kata. He also uses the weapon during the films climax to deal with the villain's twin tonfa attack. You would never know that he broke his wrist during filming judging by his physical performance. Though this might not sound impressive by Asian stuntman standards, it's still very impressive.

Northern Kung Fu practitioner Jason Pai Paio puts on a decent performance as always. While this might not be his strongest Martial Arts showcase, it's still great to see him fighting alongside the Black Dragon again. Wu-Shu Queen Yuen Qiu (*Kung Fu Hustle*) is yet another very talented addition to the productions cast. In one sequence she shows just how handy she can be with a section of lead piping. Hitting her opponents from all angles and even showcasing a few Wu-Shu moves at the same time. Being an early role in Qui's career her acting is not quite up to her later roles. In my opinion she performs one of the best Bruce Lee impressions I've ever seen in *Kung Hustle*(2004). Both Paio and Qui are strong support for the star, but they clearly didn't want them over shadowing Van Clief. Character actor and stuntman Addy Sung Gam-Loi(Crystal Fist) nearly steals the film as the helpful but naive antiques shop worker. Sadly he doesn't get into any fights in this one.

The film is not without its negatives and it appears it may have gotten into some legal trouble?. All the prints I've watched from the VHS to the DVD release have muted Bruce Lee's surname, whenever he's mentioned in the movie. Not sure if the film was released theatrically this way?. The soundtrack as you can imagine is not one of the movies positives either. The basic score is pretty ominous and doesn't really work in all the scenes it's used in. The film that was shot in under two weeks, and it probably spent even less time in post production. Ron Van Clief does dub his own voice which was pretty rare for a Hong Kong production at the time. The dub features some unintentionally funny dialogue as you would expect. One character is left for dead on a beach with his eyes gouged. The cops tell our heroes he drowned only for one of them to reply with "drowned my ass".

The Black Dragon's Revenge is an entertaining slice of old school grind house cinema. It's not the greatest Hong Kong movie ever made but it's a million miles away from the worst. Certainly one of the better entries from the 1970's Bruce Lee exploitation cinema. That said this is a low budget movie and fans shouldn't expect amazing production values. Some of the interior shots were filmed in New York doubling for Hong Kong. Ron Van Clief can also be spotted wearing one of his own T-Shirts with the symbol of his Martial Arts style **Chinese-Goju** on the front. Sure there was no wardrobe department for this one?. Yet its touches like this that adds to its overall charm.

**Black Enforcer, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Ho Meng-Hua)** - Tien Feng is a criminal incarcerated for murdering an entire family. Tung Li plays his partner who is also shackled along with him. Tang Ching (who is called the Black Enforcer) has arrested him and stops off at his home to rest for the night as the snow is picking up.

Later in the night, Tien Feng's gang ambushes Tang Ching and his officers. After all the officers are killed, Tien kills Tang's family and rapes his daughter in front of him as he passes out from sword wounds. Tien kidnaps Tang's woman and burns the place as they make their escape.

Tien's son, who is also an officer, was in charge of the ambush and after Tien meets up with him, he and Tung Li divvy up their share of stolen gold. Tien Feng then betrays Tung but not before Tung burns his eyes with a torch blinding Tien permanently. Tung falls off a cliff presumably to his death.

Tang is punished severely for allowing the wanted murderers to escape so he is sentenced to 15 years in a solitary dungeon. While he serves an unjust sentence, Tien has learned how to fight with his blindness and has forced Tang's woman to marry one of his sons in the interim. Also, Tien has covered up his past and lied to his now grown up children making them believe he is a righteous man. Once Tang gets out of solitary, he goes to get his revenge first by killing Tien's eldest son, the officer, who had him arrested. He is waiting for him when he gets out of prison only to be killed by Tang instead. Also, Tung Li had survived the fall from the cliff and he, too is seeking revenge on Tien Feng's character.

This was an interesting swordplay film and it's a shame Celestial or IVL didn't make room for this one. Tang Ching gets another juicy role as a man who suffers much in the name of justice almost as shattering as the role he played in *Vengeance is a Golden Blade* (1969). Tien Feng is as evil as ever almost as cruel as his totally cruel and nasty turn in *Sword of Swords* (1968). Chao Hsiung is also on hand as one of Tien Feng's characters sons. He plays seemingly a good guy who has been deceived by his father into believing Tang Ching's character is the actual villain. It was nice to see Tung Li again, this time as a villain which, with his looks, suits him perfectly. Tung can be seen as the hero in *The Black Tavern* (1972) and a good guy in *The Imperial Swordsman* (1971).

**Black Justice, The (Taiwan, 1976: Kuo Ching-Chiang) - aka The Inflexible Judge Pao** - The title refers to a judge who sticks to the letter of the law, won't take bribes, and will order the execution of a prince if he is guilty. He is about to order such an execution but after the opening credits the scene switches and Chan We-Lau is a bumbling judge. The copy I found of this movie is missing many frames making it hard to follow. The subtitles are white on white, cut off on the ends, and absent in many places. I tried to watch it only because Chia Ling is top billed. I doubt a proper copy exists. She enters a fight at about 16 minutes in. I fast forwarded to the fights and they are average at best. Overall too much effort to watch and little payoff found. I would try again if I can find a laser disk version or similar digital quality. The only reason for this review is perhaps someone else out there can help me with a better copy.

**Black Society (Hong Kong, 1978: Wong Man, Wei Man)** - Triad fu-laced hijinks with Wilson Tong (who is action director too) and Chan Wai Man. Tong and Chan start as Triad brothers, but split apart before the end fight. Considering how great both of these men are with their legs, Tong's choreography is a slight letdown as I was expecting a far more vicious end fight. It gets a little dirty, but not as much as a match between these men would promise. This is really Wilson's movie, as his character is more in the forefront. Fine by me, I just wish I knew what was going on (the copy I have was very light on English subtitles (about three or four lines of dialog translated every 20 minutes or so.)) Regardless, Chan looks swell rocking the mustache and lounging around like a boss (which I presume he is, since everyone answers to him) when he isn't busting people up.

**Black Tavern, The (Hong Kong: 1972: Teddy Yip)** - 80 minutes of swordplay- and fight simplicity. There's rumours of an official arriving at an inn carrying a box of bribes. Out come the robbers. Not giving a damn about being similar to genre tropes established commercially by King Hu, Teddy Yip's film distances itself nicely from obvious comparisons to **Come Drink With Me** and **Dragon Inn**. Expertly designed and entertaining, there's plenty of colourful characteristics in each group of performers that arrive at the inn. Chief among them the whipmaster played with confidence by Ku Feng and for an early 70s movie (even at Shaw Brothers), the action choreography is very fast and fluent. Often feeling like each scenario is unique and different through the atmospheric key setting and creative camerawork. Also with Shih Szu, Tung Li, Wu Ma, Wang Hsieh and Dean Shek as the singing beggar in an expressive turn.

**Blazing Temple, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Joseph Kuo)** - Following on from the success of the '18 Bronzemen' movies, Joseph Kuo returns to the Shaolin temple for more inspiration and again casts Carter Wong in the starring role. While 'The Blazing Temple' doesn't contain quite as much fight action as the previous films, it does compare well in terms of the production values with large battle scenes, lush sets and authentic costume design.

The sacking of the Shaolin Temple by the Manchus has been depicted on screen many times and is the basis for the story here although begins with a feud between the Manchu emperor and his sister (Chia Ling), suspected of conspiring with rebels. When her immediate family is murdered by the emperor and her retaliatory assassination attempt fails, Chia Ling turns to the Shaolin monks for help. A rebellion is anticipated however and the emperor sends an army to destroy the Shaolin temple, unleashing a terrific cannon assault.

The monks are forced to escape from the temple but the abbott insists that, in keeping with tradition, they must still face the trials required of all leaving monks before they are allowed to go. You'd think that, given the circumstances, they would have waived this rule (time being of the essence and all) and you also kind of wonder why the 18 bronzemen aren't getting the hell out of there themselves. But anyway.

Just before making his escape, Carter Wong is entrusted with a martial arts book by the Abbott and tasked with leading the rebellion against the emperor. Forced to hide in the hills the monks decide to take the fight to their enemies and attack the emperor's palace in the film's climax.

As mentioned earlier, the film does feature some impressive sets and costumes, and a large cast of extras, indicating a relatively large budget. External shots of the temple are obviously of a model which is used quite extensively during the burning of the temple scenes. The fight action is confined to the start and end of the film, with main section concerning the sacking of Shaolin, and is largely swordplay. Only at the end, when Carter Wong, unleashes his 18 styles, does hand to hand combat feature.

The fight scenes are all lively affairs, especially the ending which sees Carter Wong surrounded by multiple attackers and working himself into a bit of a frenzy. These sequences don't really seem to be the main focus of the film though, rather it's the drama of the attack on Shaolin lent extra weight through the inclusion of characters with real substance.

**Blind Boxer (Hong Kong, 1972: Cheung Sam)** - Generic template that would've fit a period martial arts picture as well, **Blind Boxer** is set in the modern world of organized tournament fighting. With the invincible Japanese fighter dubbed Gorilla (Kim Young-In) viciously beating up and even being allowed to murder his opponents by the bookmaking organizations, Song Lu (Tony Liu, aka Wong Jan-Yeung. Future director of **Holy Flame Of The Martial World, Dreaming The Reality** etc) manages to get a draw out of his fight with him. The organizers still go after him violently as well as fellow student Fong Man (Jason Pai) who, true to the movie's title, is blinded by in the process. Looming is revenge in the ring and the taking down of an organization. Surviving sufficiently as a movie although no one would mistake this for high drama, **Blind Boxer** does its best work in the ring and when action in general is concerned. While noticeably sped up at points, the gritty power of the ring-fights is effective but a real time slow factor is not present in select choreography outside of it. Here the ferocity takes a step up and many of the fast exchanges are above average what you would expect out of action choreography of 1972.

**Blind Fist Of Bruce (Hong Kong, 1979: Kam Bo)** - A Bruce Li film where Bruce Li plays a bank owner who loses everything after a gang led by Kong Do beats him up badly. He then begins learning Fu from a blind old master played by Simon Yuen in order to get revenge.

The movie has nice action (especially from Simon Yuen, but it gets ruined by the really bad ratio of the version which is a heavily cropped fullscreen), but it gets a bit boring rather fast. After a really nice first third or so with hilarious comedy (courtesy of the two sidekicks Bruce Li gets, the "bedside kung fu" line just floored me), the movie gets repetitive and the last two thirds or so can be summed up in a few words: Bruce Li learns a bit from Simon Yuen, gets beaten by Kong Do, learns more from Simon Yuen, gets beaten again... I know the revenge plot calls for it, but it gets old quickly.

The comedy however (especially early on) is hilarious. Bruce Li has two sidekicks who are supposed to be his fu teachers and they are hilarious in how incompetent they are -they make up styles (ever heard of the Elephant Trunk Fist ? Or the Elephant Slip ?) and the English dub gives them great voices and lines. Speaking of the dub, Kong Do has a really cool voice here. And to finish on a BIG flaw, since we're in the sound department... The sound gets out of synch about halfway through the film. Not by much, but hearing a hit and seeing it a couple of seconds later is kinda annoying.

**Blood Brothers (Hong Kong, 1973: Chang Cheh)** - aka **Dynasty of Blood** - A trio of sworn-friends find their fortune in a land rife with trouble and civil strife with one of them eventually committing a betrayal, an act leading to death and revenge. This is of course the rough synopsis of **A BULLET IN THE HEAD** widely seen as John Woo's masterpiece, his most personal movie and one of the most harrowing pieces of film ever made. Yet this is also the story of **BLOOD BROTHERS** (a.k.a. **DYNASTY OF BLOOD**), a seventies martial-art yarn by the genre grand master filmmaker Chang Cheh, where Woo happened to work as an assistant- director and reportedly was inspired by this film for his later Vietnam epic. It starred the three great Shaw Brother studio martial stars of the time: Ti Lung, David Chiang and Chen Kuan-Tai.



An up and coming Quin dynasty provincial governor Ma Hsin I has been assassinated in full view. At the trial the assassin Chang Wan Hsing (David Chiang) freely offers his confession and tells the story of his relationship with Ma and the events that led him to do this murderous deed. Chang and his sworn-brother Huang Chung (Chen Kuan Tai) were highwaymen who confronted an oncoming rider, Ma (Ti Lung), to rob him. Instead, through his remarkable fighting skills, his bravery, the sheer force of his personality and his promise of a great future if they joined him, they all became sworn-brothers. The trio then challenged the Mountain bandits and upon becoming their leader Ma builds them into a potent fighting force. Once that is done, the ambitious and single-minded Ma leaves to attend a state-sponsored military examination in order to become a high ranking officer with the regular army and also to get away from Mi-lan (Chang Lien) Huang Chung's beautiful wife with whom he has become smitten with feelings which are reciprocated. A couple of years later Ma has succeeded in his aim and become an up-and coming general. He calls back his brothers and their men to wage a successful campaign against rebels. If anything, time has only intensified the feelings between Ma and Mi-lan, but their love is forbidden as she is the wife of his sworn-brother, leading the ruthless Ma to take a fateful decision that will have dire consequences for all involved.

"ASSASSINATING MA" (the Chinese actual title) is based on an actual mid-nineteenth century Quin dynasty case which became the subject of many notorious accounts either in literary fiction, political essays or Chinese opera and was adapted several times for the screen - most notably in 1929 and 1949. Common wisdom has always depicted Ma and the unfaithful wife as being truly despicable, reviled characters with the woman coming across as little more than a cheap woman lacking in morals. Chang Cheh though had other ideas for his version and made it into a star-crossed tragic love story. By casting Ti Lung and the beautiful actress Chang Lien in the lead roles, ones that others thought more suited for an absolutely evil looking actor and a porn actress (for nude scenes of course) Cheh changed the mood and direction of the film. In this reviewer's opinion, the love story - displayed in coy yet somewhat theatrical fashion - is actually the best realized aspect of this movie and the scenes of Lung and his leading lady are quite touching as the viewer can clearly see the desire, joy, pain and guilt that both of them have. We sympathise all the more with the wife's plight as her husband Chen Kuan Tai is truly something of an innocent oaf who neglects his spouse and spends his time with either his buddy David Chiang or whoring and drinking with courtesans. Ti Lung's cast against type performance is commendable in this movie, as he leaves behind his days of young impetuous bare-chested fighter to play a much darker and commanding character, ruthless and single-minded yet sensitive to one woman's beauty and love and he quite suffers for it. He had at long last come of age as an actor and the film really clinched his popularity.

Other aspects of the film are not so well realized however. Chang Cheh had established much of his reputation with the intense bonding between his male characters. Surprisingly though, in BLOOD BROTHERS precious little time and effort is really spent on establishing and cultivating the close bond the sworn-brothers are supposed to have between them; at least when compared to some of his earlier movies. If David Chiang and Chen Kuan Tai act as the best of buddies, Ti Lung always remains aloof and remote and seems to establish no true bond with the other two. Clearly, Chang Cheh's focus was with the love story but his neglect of the male bonding theme undermines some of the film's dramatic soundness. Further for the sake of narrative simplicity, Chang has given a flashback structure to the film. It's David Chiang who recalls in his confession his history with Ma and what led him to kill him. It's a nice idea but with a serious flaw in its logic. Indeed if it is Chiang's tale, then where do the entire intimate scenes between Ma and Huang's wife come from. Besides, the plight of the star-crossed couple is shown with sympathy, but Chiang has no sympathy whatsoever for them. As soon as he found out, he called the wife a bitch and Ma a betrayer. It is something of a minor quibble which truly does not affect or diminish the film overall, but it remains a very obvious flaw regardless.

Backed by Shaw Brother resources and Chang Cheh's skills, BLOOD BROTHERS is an expectedly well crafted movie with good production values and a classy look. Time though has not been kind to it as poor preservation and bad English dubbing have given it something of a stale even hokey look to it. As this is a martial art-movie and not a period piece, there is plenty of fighting that is reasonably well set within the tragic tale. The fight choreography is okay. It's of the realistic variety with intricate moves by the performers although by contemporary standards they look a bit slow and tame. Most of it is shot outdoors and in wide-shot, which allows one to see the actors perform their own moves but the camera's distance somewhat diminishes the intensity. Martial art fighting works best in indoor settings and with medium shots, and as a matter of fact the most compelling fight scene is the one between Chiang and Ti Lung which is precisely done in that fashion. Occasional slow-motion, gives some gripping moments to the Chiang/Ti Lung final showdown but otherwise viewers might find their out-doors ultimate encounter perhaps lacking.

Bey Logan in his Hong-Kong Action Cinema book has called BLOOD BROTHERS "innovative", perhaps because it was the first Shaw Brothers movie to tackle the Qin Dynasty period. This was deemed a taboo era in filmmaking because Chinese people were subjugated by foreign Manchurian rule and forced to wear the pigtail hairstyle as a sign of submission to their ruler. In time, the pigtail had become a despised mark of infamy for many Chinese especially those living abroad in South East Asia. As the region was the main market for Shaw Brothers films it was deemed therefore commercially non-viable to do a movie set during this despised period. Further Run Run Shaw, the Shaw studio chairman, was himself dead set against "pigtail" movies for the same reason. Somehow, Chang Cheh

convinced Shaw to change their policy, a decision which in the end paid-off as BLOOD BROTHERS ended-up being ranked 10th at the box-office for that year, the highest for a Shaw martial movie. The following years started the Qin era set Shaolin Kung-fu sub-genre pioneered once again by Chang Cheh, and the once taboo period became kung fu's new movie setting of choice. Star viewers beware; the film sports a brief early appearance by "born a cop" actor Danny Lee, wearing a longhaired wig and using a spear as a rebel fighter. It's an undistinguished appearance where the future "inspector Lee" is barely recognisable, only really noticeable for the goofy way he tumbles down when struck dead.

In its current poor dubbed video form, BLOOD BROTHERS is a tentative recommendation. Yet despite this and other flaws, it remains quite worthwhile for its drama and also for Ti Lung's against type role. After all it's not everyday you see a usual good guy playing the villain. Also, let's not forget that it serves as template for one of John Woo best movies.

**Blood and Guts (Taiwan, 1971: Li Kuo-Ha) - Avengers; Samurai Blood, Samurai Guts** - If you didn't get enough of Kong Pun (sort of like not getting enough of Clu Gulager) in films like Soul of Samurai, he returns in this equally inept, slightly less enjoyable pile of nonsense about a super samurai kind of guy who is hounded by the dreaded Wood Hag. weirdly enough, she looks a lot like the Sea Hag from the Popeye cartoons, and is just as over the top.

In order to kill Kong, the Wood Hag, who has to be pissed about her nickname in a world where other people get to be known as Invincible Dawn and Ghost Faced Killer, tricks a noble but obviously dumb-as-toast samurai into hunting him down. Why this kungfu guy, err I mean samurai, would trust this crazy old witch and not the other kungfu guy who he constantly sees being noble is beyond me. But then, 99% of all kungfu films would be five minutes long if people just explained themselves instead of launching convoluted schemes based on miscommunication. Why listen to a rational explanation when you can just yell "You die!" or "Try my fist!" and start fighting instead?

There really isn't too much to say about this one other than it features a ton of incredibly subpar sword-swinging and a lot of jumping. When you make a kungfu film, if your stars can't fight for shit, at least make them jump a lot. These guys fulfill the jumping requirement, and at least a dozen trampolines must have been used during this film.

The best thing I can say about this film is that I didn't gnaw my own leg off while watching it. It was bad, but not unenjoyably so. If I ever watch it again, it'll only be because I can't remember a damn thing about it, including that I already watched it.

**Blood Child (Hong Kong, 1982: Vincent Leung) - aka Five Fingers of Steel** - Even though I grew up watching lots of Kung Fu classics on cable TV and videotape, FIVE FINGERS OF STEEL was one of a few old school flicks that escaped my attention. Everything I'd heard and read about this Hwang Jang Li film was basically negative. So when I had recently had the opportunity to sit down and view it for the first time, I wasn't expecting much. Ultimately, there were a lot of things with FIVE FINGERS OF STEEL that I took exception to, but there were also quite a few surprises. Most notable of all was that one of the ultimate Kung Fu villains, Hwang Jang Li, played one of the heroes! The person responsible for all the mayhem and carnage in the flick is another Korean boot-master, Kwan Yung Moon. You can see Moon in HELL'S WINDSTAFF (1979), FIGHTING ACE (1979), and MY YOUNG AUNTIE (1981). Kwan Yung Moon is the second-best leg fighter in Korea, and his role model is clearly that of Hwang Jang Li. This scenario leads to the inevitable clash between both men, and it's like Hwang Jang Li fighting himself. The cast is rounded out by Yuen Moa, who portrays the righteous Wong Sheng. Moa appeared in such favorites as THE PRODIGAL SON (1982), ENCOUNTER OF THE SPOOKY KIND (1981), and THE DEAD AND THE DEADLY (1983). Yen Shi Kwan is another performer who can be seen in such Shaw brothers classics as BOXER FROM SHANTUNG (1972), POLICE FORCE (1973), and LEGEND OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES (1974). FIVE FINGERS OF STEEL also stars the irascible Chan Lau, who portrays one of the criminal masterminds. Lau has played similar roles in movies like DUEL OF THE SEVEN TIGERS (1979), DRAGON'S CLAWS (1979), and DRAGON ON FIRE (1980). FIVE FINGERS OF STEEL is available on DVD from PanMedia, those mysterious purveyors of obscure DVD bootlegs of varying (and questionable) quality.

Mr. Leung and his daughter run an escort company, and his team of fighters will guard and transport persons or cargo for the right price. During a Chinese holiday, the residents of a local village take part in the celebrations including Mr. Leung and his entourage. The festival is disrupted by students from the High Kick school, which is run by a rival of Mr. Leung named Chiu (Kwan Yung Moon). These student have no respect for the celebration and end up drawing Mr. Leung and his men into a major brawl. One of Mr. Leung's, followers, Wong Sheng (Yuen Moa), fights like a tiger, and sends the students scurrying back to their master, Chiu. The evil master has lost face because of the defeat of his top students in public, and he vows to get back at Mr. Leung. Chiu recruits the wiles of a corrupt

official (Chan Lau) and they concoct a plan to ruin Mr. Leung. Having some political clout, the villains suggest Mr. Leung's escort company to transport the Emperor's gold bullion. With the approval of police Captain Yu, Mr. Leung's accepts the assignment and escorts the bullion across harsh terrain. Midway through the job, a group of masked assassins descend upon the escorts. Mr. Leung, Wong Sheng, and his men fight for their lives against the masked killers. During the battle, masks are ripped off and it is revealed that Chiu's students are the culprits. Soon, Chiu himself shows up to fight against the escorts. His boot is loaded with a blade, which he uses to slash Mr. Leung.

Word of the attack gets back to the authorities. Chiu arranges for the blame to be put on the shoulders of Captain Yu who vouched for the escorts. At Mr. Leung's place his daughter is distraught and Captain Yu tries to comfort her. Suddenly, her father stumbles in near death and reveals that no one survived the attack except himself. Then he places the blame on Chiu before dying. But Mr. Leung is wrong; he is not the only survivor. Wong Sheng is also alive, rescued by his brother Wong Lung (Hwang Jang Li). The two men plot the downfall of Chiu and his evil comrades. Meanwhile, Captain Yu goes to Chiu's house to arrest him. Captain Yu is overmatched by Chiu and his men, and they attack, capture, and torture him. Ms. Leung bribes a corrupt jailer to let her into the prison where Chiu keeps Captain Yu. She enters the cell to help Captain Yu, but the corrupt jailer returns with Chiu, who promptly beats and rapes her. She is constantly tortured until Chiu discovers she is pregnant with his child. Only then does he stop beating her because he wants to be a father. When the baby is finally born, Chiu discovers that his offspring is deformed from all the abuse heaped at its mother. Meanwhile, Wong Sheng invades the jailhouse to break Captain Yu out of prison. Wong Sheng successfully frees him, but the two must fight against impossible odds to escape. Both men are seriously wounded, yet manage to escape into the hills. Chiu comes up with a plan to flush out Captain Yu and his allies. He stages a public execution of Ms. Leung, for he knows the heroes will soon follow. Captain Yu, Wong Sheng, and Wong Lung, return to fight the forces of Chiu and his gang to the death....

FIVE FINGERS OF STEEL deserves credit for its semi-original plot and performances by the cast. Kwan Yung Moon is great as the villain and he has the most screen time. Equally entertaining is Chan Lau who plays the skinny, sneaky runt role that's quite common in these flicks. These two over power everyone else in the cast including the bland heroes, notwithstanding Hwang Jang Li. But even the bootmaster himself does not get much screen time. The script paints him as a character motivated by revenge, and shows him training (he uses his martial arts skills to uproot trees) throughout the movie. Then in a complete 100% turn from his motivation, his character flatly refuses to assist Wong Sheng and Captain Yu in the final battle. Ultimately, he joins his friends on the battlefield in a truly explosive climax. Hwang Jang Li only has about 10 spoken lines in the whole film. Director Leung Wing Shan tries to keep things fresh by showing portions of the movie as a flashback, to explain the dead body of Mrs. Leung's bastard child. This is where things become awfully surreal and bizarre. In one riotous scene when the deformed baby is born, the father Chiu is anxious to see his offspring. When he holds the baby and witnesses its distorted features, he flies into a rage and blames the mother—he doesn't understand that his own torturing and beating of Ms. Leung is what caused the infant's condition. The tone for these moments are dark, but unintentionally humorous in their outrageousness. Hwang Jang Li is also responsible for the film's fight choreography. He produces some great work here along the lines of the Jackie Chan/Sammo Hung stuff, very flashy with some decent weapons and footwork. Unfortunately, the filmmakers' felt that Li's fight execution wasn't fast enough, because they have the audacity to speed up each and every fight in the film. So all the combat scenes look superhumanly comical; this really ruins it for me and hurts the film itself. I can understand one or two overcranked scenes to heighten the impact of a fight, but each and every bit of action in a movie is ludicrous.

**Blood Of Dragon Peril (Taiwan, 1980: Rocky Man)** - The Japanese invaded China set against a cold and dramatic backdrop is surprisingly well handled in combination with some breathtaking martial arts action. Essentially the invaders have hired one of the Chinese (the main character of Lui) to handle the matter of The Doll Bride Mask who's leading a destructive rebellion against the Japanese. Lui is of course disliked by his own people and family but tries to stand firm under the circumstances. A basic melodrama but one that works fairly well against the gritty nature of the narrative, to boot there's some excellent kicking from the man behind the mask. Acrobatic showcase amidst a basher and a surprising end reveal is proof that Blood Of Dragon Peril demands attention all throughout its lean running time.

**Blood of the Leopard (Taiwan, 1972: Kim Lung)** - Tian Lung troop is a theater and acrobats troop which chief is Shifu Kuang. Among the artists, there are Xiao Fu, Xiao Lung (Kong Ban), Mei Feng (Xiao Fu's lover), Yi Peng and Shifu Kuang's wife.

In the beginning of the movie, they arrive in a town where they had already played three years ago and where Kong Ban met Miss Teng (Cheung Ching Ching) and the two fell in love. They go to the Teng's house and discover that it's empty and devastated since a while.

While they are performing in the theater of the town, they are attacked by Chen Hung Lieh and his men. Though they don't want to fight, they are forced to because Chen Hung Lieh wants to spend a night with Kuang's wife. During the battle, Kong Ban and Xiao Fu kill Chen Hung Lieh and some of his men.

When he discovers that, Chen Hung Lieh's brother, nicknamed Leopard, sends his headman and a lot of men to take revenge. The headman is killed and a lot of members of the troop are killed. Kuang and his wife are prisoners, while Kong Ban, Yi Peng, Mei Feng and Xiao Fu are hurt and/or saved by mysterious ladies who are fighting very well.

Later, Kuang's wife is framed by Leopard, who offers to save her husband if she agrees to spend nights with him. She agrees in order to save her husband, but Leopard's men hang him to death. When the survivors of the troop try to get the corpse in order to give their master decent funerals, they are caught in a trap and killed. Xiao Fu goes to Leopard's house and team with Kuang's wife (it seems that at this moment of the movie, a scene is missing), but they fail : Xiao Fu is killed, though the mysterious ladies tried to help him, and Kuang's wife is still prisoner.

Then, we discover that the mysterious ladies (5 ladies) are under Miss Teng's orders. She explains to her lover Kong Ban that her father was killed by Leopard 3 years ago, 3 days after the troop's departure and that if she hasn't still took revenge, it's because she's not match for Leopard, who uses iron finger skill. She presents Kong Ban to a Master Wang who knows the eagle's claw skill and he accepts to train him.

On the 50th Leopard's birthday, Cheung Ching Ching, Mei Feng, the 5 ladies, Yi Peng and Kong Ban go to take revenge and they finally succeed in it. I highly recommend this movie : very good story and fights. As usual, Yee Yuen, Suen Yuet and Chen Hung Lieh are as villains as possible, and Cheung Ching Ching and Kong Ban are superb. We mustn't forget the five other ladies and the actress who plays Kuang's wife, who are good fighters too. At the end of the movie, the end scene jumps and seems to be cut, that's a little bit a pity, but the movie is still worth to watch and enjoy.

**Blooded Treasury Fight (Taiwan, 1979: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - Okay, so we have an excellent cast, a top-tier action director, and a director with a lot of solid Shaw Brothers experience. Does that translate into first class entertainment? Damn skippy it does!

Marshall Chow (Dorian Tan) is on a mission to find the treasure belonging to the late leader of an anti-Qing sect. He enlists the aid of a condemned criminal (Chiang), said criminal's former girlfriend (Chan Bik-Fung, *Shaolin Heroes*), a thief (Fan Mei-Sheng), and Chow's right-hand man (Choi Wang, the rope-axe dude from *Five Shaolin Masters*). But the mission won't be an easy one. The sect. is still around, now led by Michael Chan Wai-Man and Marshall Chow and his team will have to get past a veritable army to find the treasure. But alas, not everything is as it seems. Backs will be stabbed (sometimes quite literally), crosses will be doubled, and alliances will change before the film is over.

There's so much going on and so many characters to keep track of, not to mention that you never know who's on whose side, that the film is never boring. It's Always interesting, even before the actual martial arts action picks up in the second half. The final set piece on the millstones is incredibly brutal, with one death making a stoneface like me wince. Besides abundant hand-to-hand combat, there are lots of wire-jumps, sabers, spears, arrows, hidden weapons, blowguns, the whole she-bang-a-bang on display here.

Dorian Tan kicks like a madman, but he is almost passed up by Chang Yi-Tao, who matches him with manic intensity. Chan Wai-Man is solid as an eagle claw master, although his kicks are nothing to scoff at. Choi Wang, who plays a silent character, owns the action with his strength and physique during the first hour. Only David Chiang really disappoints with a fighting performance that's merely adequate (too bad Yuen Cheung-Yan couldn't get as much out of him as Huang Ha in *The Deadly Challenger*), although he does make up for it with his innate charm. Some viewers will recognize actress Kim Jeong-Nan as the tomboy from Jackie Chan's classic *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*, and her role is fairly similar here.

**Bloody Escape, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Chang Cheh, Sun Chung)** - Chen Kuan Tai in an early leading role once again taking names and lives of his former gang The Wolf's Head gang. This is the earliest Sun Chung Shaw Brothers film I've seen besides the delightful *The Devil's Mirror* and I enjoyed the intensity of the story / pacing. CKT is Wolf's Head gang brother Gu Hui who has a change of heart when he falls in love with Shih Szu.

Gu Hui gets in the middle of a fight between the Wolf's Head Gang leader and a Mr. Jin which ultimately sets the stage for Gui fleeing the gang. In between this though, the gang's rules are changed from talking half the money and no killing to the exact opposite.

Gu is horrified by the changes and confronts the chief. The chief tells him the new rules about killing, rape and such being okay. A hit upon travelers, makes Gu not want to go. And this is where Shih Szu comes in. Gu Hui falls in love with her and they escape. They go their separate ways, but Shih Szu cannot give him up despite being rescued by important government men. Gu has several moments of crisis as he goes from a lawless bandit into more lawful and compassionate man.

Of course there will be blows between Gu and his former gang brothers.

The choreography is handled by Lau Kar Wing and I'm happy to say LKW clearly takes advantage of CKT's martial prowess. Brother Gu is largely a bare handed fighter and that's a good thing. I enjoy watching Chen Kuan Tai fight, he radiates a particular charisma that makes it easy to watch him and his form is terrific.

Of course, this being a Sun Chung film, laws and lawlessness prevail. It's interesting to see this in the context of another gang and the innocent people the gangs' actions impact (feeling almost as intimate and claustrophobic as the excellent *The Avenging Eagle*), and Chen Kuan Tai gets to act a bit too.

Very good early film from Sun Chung, with a fine performances from CKT and Shih Szu and some nice choreography from Lau Kar Wing (who also appears as a Wolf's Head member.) Also Sun was already using some camera styles (slow motion, distortion etc. that would become a hallmark when he returned to making wuxia.)

Seeing this film makes me appreciate Sun Chung all the more. I quite like that he was exploring his favorite themes within his Shaws work so early and it's very interesting to see how he would take this particular story formula and up it considerably for *The Avenging Eagle*.

**Bloody Fist, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Ng See-Yuen) aka Deadly Buddhist Raiders; Death Beach** - Another Japanese as bad guys trying to take over local martial arts clubs list. Though this one adds in a MacGuffin in the guise of the Dragon Herb. This herb is needed to cure a plague, but the Japanese want it for themselves (though they do offer to pay.) Not as good as the earlier *Fist of Fury* or the later *Hapkido* in both action and plot it does offer some brutal basher fight scenes. It also has a good guy appearance from Chan Sing who normally plays the antagonist including a bad Japanese in *New Fist of Fury*. The main bad guy (of course Japanese) is played by Chen Kuan-tai. I will watch anything with him in it. However, when his character is first introduced he is wearing a face covering mask that is similar to The Winter Solider in the second *Captain America* – seriously it reminds me of it with the long hair parted in the middle. But what is pretty hilarious is that it appears that a few people are doubling for Chen (check skin color, eye shape, nose shape etc...) until he takes that mask off for good.

One way you can tell a non-martial artist from an accomplished one is the way they will do certain kicks especially a spinning heel kick. If you see the leg whip around way earlier than the head (especially awkwardly) than that is a tell-tale sign of a novice. But what would a basher film be without flailing arms and legs. Check out Fong Yau's head movements when he fights – it is all over the place.

But with Yuen Wo-ping being one of the action directors (and an appearance in the film), the brutal action and a decent amount of it comes off well. The plot does not fare well with (I think) disappearing characters, one bizarre rape scene that probably should have been removed and a meandering “do we even have a” script. Suen Lam (as Chen San) has one of those made to be a bad guy faces and his overuse of facial contortions. I have to stifle the urge to punch the TV when he is on it. Maybe that makes him good or maybe he is just a different version of Dean Shek. Maybe those two should have done a buddy movie together.

It looks like it is filmed in Taiwan. Because of the one and only car and no mention of a war with the Japanese I would put this film at some time in the 1920s or 30s (not sure how old that car is.) It has an early appearance of a nunchaku. This was put on the sohu.com top 100 classic martial art films. I cannot find a link to it, but the movies are mentioned on icheckmovies. I doubt it would make my top 100 though.

**Bloody Hero (Philippines, 1976: Chik Yiu-cheong)** - I finally saw this movie and this is indeed the movie I saw on the USA network back in the early 90's. This is the second time I have seen this movie because I had forgotten the name of it. I didn't know that the other lead besides Unicorn Chan was Meng fei, actually I thought he was Lau Wing. But the movie was as good as I remembered with a good storyline. Some crooks tried to buy Unicorn Chan and Meng fei's characters father land, and Unicorn chan was willing to sign it over to them because he was enticed by the money. Because they were holding out, the thugs came through and caused a fight which led their father to die. Meng fei blamed Unicorn Chan for this, but the brothers reunited in the end, to get their revenge. Unicorn Chan fought really well as did Meng fei of course. It was a good movie and good balance of drama as well as action. I would recommend it.

The two main bad guys seem to not really do much fighting until the end. The main bad guy at the end is Ruben Ramos who's in a lot of Bruce Le Filipino movies usually twirling the double knives. The main henchman is Ernie Ortega who fought Chuck Norris in the first Missing in Action (he played Vinh), you'll also see him in some of the Bruce Le Filipino shot films. I notice he sometimes plays a Japanese Samurai and uses the two handed sword style (I wonder if he trained in that previously?). There's a few other featured Chinese henchmen, don't remember them off the top of my head.

**Bloody Mask of Karate (Taiwan, 1969: Patrick Kong)** - A young man (Tung Lam ) is attacked by several men and he escapes and hides in an inn, without knowing that the inn belongs to his chasers. In the inn, he meets a man (Tin Ming) who saves him from being poisoned by the wine, and they fight and Tung Lam escapes. He is saved by a young lady (Lam Chi ) and her father's men.

Later, we discover that Tin Ming is Lam Chi's fiance and that he's here to send a letter from his master to Lam Chi's father. But unfortunately, he has lost the letter during the fight and he is chased by Lam Chi's father and brothers because he has told them that his master asks them for giving their help to the 4th prince of Ching, while they were planning to rebel against the Manchus and restore the Mings with the 14th prince of Ching. When he was fighting in the inn with the 14th prince's men, Tin Ming has spared a young lady's life and she returns him the letter he lost.

Then, the 4th prince comes to Lam Chi's father's fortress and tell her father and brothers that the 14th prince's men are planning to trap them in the fortress. Then, Lam Chi goes to investigate and helps her fiance to fight against them, using her " bloody mask " (a sort of flying guillotine) as weapon, and, unfortunately, Tin Ming loses the letter once again !

Then, Tin Ming and the 4th prince are prisoners in the fortress, while the 14th prince's men challenge Lam Chi's father for a fight. The young lady saved by Tin Ming discovers that they are plotting against Lam Chi's father and his men and she goes to the fortress to tell Lam Chi. Lam Chi, her fiance, his master and the young lady hurry to save the 4th prince and Lam Chi's family's life and the 4th prince and Lam Chi's father make an alliance against the evil 14th prince. That's a good action movie, worth to be watched.

**Bold Three (Taiwan, 1972: Fu Ching-Hua)** - Sat up and watched this. A little hard to understand what is going on at times, basically it's a Romeo and Juliet story, except that at one point Chen Hung Lieh's Romeo slaps the s@#t out of gorgeous Doris Lung multiple times. I don't know what it is with Taiwanese movies and tv shows, but they sure seem to slap women around in these soap opera situations. And her character knows no martial arts, so it is really unmanly.

Anyway, if you ignore that, and liked The Killer/Sacred Knives of Vengeance, you might like this one. It has a certain frenetic energy and when Chen isn't slapping Lung Chun Erh, he has a decent swagger. Very hard to get used to him playing the good guy, though I realize he has in more than a few movies. He just oozes sleaze at times. Who knows, he might have been a really nice guy, right?

Yi Yuen does a decent job at the fight scenes, and at one point it looks like he is unstoppable, until he gets used as a pin cushion by about a dozen Samurai. This is one of those hire the local samurai gang, who just hang around Shanghai waiting to get into trouble. Of course, it's set in the 1920's, so it would have more likely been Yakuza, not Samurai.

Finally, this is very similar to the Killer in that the heroic Chinese go after the Samurai with short knives, even in planned attacks!? You would think they would go out and get some Kwan do's (actually one guy does) and nine ring broadswords, but I feel that there is deliberate symbolism going on, as I have seen it in so many kung fu movies. Basically, my little Chinese knife can beat your large samurai sword, etc.

**Bone-Crushing Kid, The (Taiwan, 1979: Chen Hung-Lieh, Steven Chan Ho, Hsieh Hsing) – aka Monkey in the Master's Eyes** - It's been a long long time since I've watched this. Just as good as I remember. It's kind of a bad movie, but stays interesting with its constant fight scenes. Lots of talent on hand, and they squeeze out all they can from all the actors. Chang Chi Ping and Suen Shu Pao get cameo fights. Wong Chi Sang gives his best performance of his career. James Tien gives his full effort as the main villain. Tsang Ming Cheong gets a rare large role. He's not a very good fighter, but this movie makes me wish he had more big roles in his career because of his acting. He's great as the teacher/master. And he's not a bad fighter, he's just not that good compared to guys like Wong Chi Sang. In a couple scenes he actually does some of his own acrobatics. You've seen Tsang Ming Cheong as thug #4 in a lot of movies, and I think he's mainly a stuntman. But you never hear about him because he's probably the oldest stuntman on whatever movie he's working on.

The main attraction is seeing Chin Lung in a lead role. He takes this opportunity to show that he is an elite screen fighter. Even Jackie Chan would be in awe of his physical performance. And his acting is good too. There is a warmth in this idiot that makes you want to root for him.

**Born Invincible (Taiwan, 1977: Joseph Kuo)** - Carter Wong plays one badass Tai Chi master and spends a whole movie beating down on a kung fu school that apparently doesn't learn too fast. Great action, Carter is hella buff and *looks* invincible and Corey Yuen and Yuen Shun-Yi are remarkable for their prowess as the Pippi Longstocking brothers, whose deadly moves are matched by their awful pigtailed wigs. Another internal chi movie, where the master can move his 1 weak spot (out of 108) around at will. Likes to draw I-Ching symbols while fighting because he is sooooo badass. Quite frankly, with the competition as low on the uptake as Jack Long and the rest, I would be doing something to stifle my boredom too. Oh yes, almost forgot- Lo Lieh is Carter Wong's right-hand man, with some nice weapon skills.

**Boxer From Shantung, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Cheh, Pao Hsueh Li)** - Chen Kuan Tai stars as Ma Yung-cheng, a new arrival in Shanghai looking for work but who unwittingly steps straight into the middle of a triad war. After standing up to the notorious four champions Ma gains respect and soon has a following of his own. With his strength growing he becomes more ambitious and sets out to take over territories belonging to other gangs for himself.

David Chiang appears as Tan Wei, the leader of a rival gang, who provides the inspiration for Ma's rise. Tan and Ma come to blows in their first meeting but as a result of this fight the two give each other respect and Ma regards Tan as a friend. When Tan is murdered by the four champions' gang Ma sets out for revenge and the film culminates in an awesome bloodbath.

Chen Kuan Tai looks terrific in this early role taking on small armies in increasingly violent encounters. The final showdown sees Ma drenched in blood slaughtering wave after wave of attackers in a scene that can only be described as frenzied. [The final fight] is Probably Chen Kwan Tai's finest moment when he meets his rival crime bosses in a teahouse and finds himself facing impossible odds in an ambush. It starts with him taking an axe blow to the stomach and he continues to fight with the axe still embedded in him. This doesn't seem to slow him down though as he tears his way through dozens of triad henchmen in one of the most gloriously brutal and bloody showdowns ever made. By the end Chen looks like he's been dipped in blood from the waste down.

Chang Cheh takes great care in developing the story line and characters and this coupled with excellent choreography (provided in part by Liu Chia Liang) makes for a classic kung fu movie.

**Boxer From the Temple (Hong Kong, 1981: Lo Mar)** - A follow up film to the acclaimed 'Five Super Fighters'. Wu Yuan Chun plays a layman expelled from Shaolin for fighting who becomes the champion for a village that has long suffered under the oppression of gangsters. When Wu's loved ones are murdered he seeks revenge.

Fantastic fight scenes are woven into a rather convoluted plot that is possibly a little ambitious and maybe would have benefited from being more focussed. Within the first 10 minutes we see Wu grow up in Shaolin and master kung fu before being thrown out and embarking on his adventures.

Wu Yuan Chun dazzles in all his fight scenes displaying an amazing acrobatic ability. If I had one complaint its that the fights are a little too short. Wu manages to battle his way through 2 sets of henchman, the villain's right hand man and the uber villain in about 8 minutes. It just left me wanting more.

Note - the version I watched was the edited German print with a run time of around 1 hour 20 minutes. From past experience though, the fight scenes generally seem to be left uncut.

**Boxer Rebellion, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Chang Cheh)** - This was the last collaboration between Chang Cheh and Lau Kar-Leung before the latter struck out on his own as a director. The movie is based on real events, in which an anti-foreigner contingent referred to as Westerners as Boxers went on a government-approved campaign to stamp out foreign influences in China. They believed that through martial arts and magic, they could become invulnerable to bullets. Things came to a head when they sieged the Legations region of Beijing (chronicled in the Hollywood film *55 Days at Peking*). That ended with the armies of 8 foreign nations beating the Boxers back and iniating a horrible act of "punishment" against the Boxers.

The film deals with three martial artists (Chi Kuan Chun, Alexander Fu Sheng, and Leung Kar Yan) who sympathize with the Boxer movement, but can't stand the charlatan bastard (Johnny Wang Lung Wei) in charge of operations. The first half deals with the beginnings of the movement, and how WLW's character is able to manipulate the Dowager Empress into giving them their blessing. The siege on the Legations Region (the core of the so-called Rebellion) is only mentioned, and all we see of the eventual fall of Beijing is a fight between Leung Kar-Yan and some Japanese soldiers. The rest of the movie deals with Operation Punishment, led by German General Waldersee (Richard Harrison), which led to the unjust killings and rapes of hundreds of innocent people, especially at the hands of the Russians and Japanese.

Action-wise, the movie is pretty solid. Fans of Southern styles should enjoy Alexander Fu Sheng and Chi Kuan-Chun's hung gar. The former puts emphasis on the Tiger-Crane form, while the latter uses the Five Animal Form (similar to what they did in *Five Shaolin Masters*. There's a lot of fighting involving the heroes using rifles as clubs.

The movie is, unfortunately, unsatisfying in dramatic terms. The movie sets up a lot about how much of a liar and a cheat Wang Lung-Wei's character is, allowing hundreds (if not thousands) of men to die pointlessly just to further his ambitions. He then disappears from the greater part of the last half in the movie, showing up at the very end just so Chi Kuan Chun can fight him. The whole Boxer Movement is one big clusterf\*\*\* of tragedies. I mean, the Chinese were already getting treated like second-class citizens in their own country, and then when "punishment" was exacted following the Siege of Beijing, people who had nothing to do with the Boxers were beaten, raped and murdered. Then there's the leader of the movement, who convinced his followers that the Gods would protect them, only to not bat an eyelid when they were mowed down by the dozens by modern weaponry. And the Boxers on the whole were no Saints, proving to be little more than Government-sanctioned thugs. There's just so much material that the movie tries to pay lip service to, that a lot of it is jettisoned or barely touched upon, even in a 137-minute film, the second-longest kung fu movie I've seen so far. Flawed, but still fascinating.

**Boxer's Adventure, The (Taiwan, 1979: Tyrone Hsu Tien-Yung)** - Evil Yuen Si Ki is attempting to take over a Chinese province and must be stopped. Out to get him is Captain Lee (Tan Tao Liang) who goes to tiger village to enlist their three top fighters. These three men are played by legendary 70's Martial Arts regulars Jack Long, Blacky Ko & Meng Fei. As the four men go out to stop Yuen Si Ki it soon becomes clear their might be a traitor amongst them.

"Call me a nancy boy again and Ill kill you"



*Boxers Adventure* is a fine example of independent kung fu film making. The opening sequence is a great start to the film with all the main stars showing off their Martial Arts skills. Super kicker Tan Tao Liang is on fine form showing off his amazing leg skills. Plenty of great boot work and some really good fight choreography on display here. There's the right balance of humor and action with some great banter between the tiger village fighters. The film isn't without its flaws and it does plod a little at the start. Well worth a watch if your fan of the cast & old school Kung Fu films.

**Boxer's Omen (Hong Kong, 1983: Kueh Chi-Hung)** - Boxer's Omen is crazy. It's 105 minutes of over-the-top psychedelia, a gonzo pukefest of epic proportions, interspersed with the austere rituals of Theravada Buddhism and 80s-centric travelogue. The film is so loaded with undead bats, puppet spiders slurping blue ooze, pus-spewing, viscera-rendering, eyeball-gouging, and stomach-turning grossouts, that you're hardly prepared for its many sudden moments of beauty.

A young man fights a boxing-match against muscle-bound Bolo Yeung in Thailand. Bolo beats the young man; he dies. The young man's brother, played with riveting determination by Philip Ko, travels to Thailand to seek vengeance against Bolo Yeung... but somehow he gets caught up in a battle between good and evil, where a Buddhist saint (who was Philip Ko's twin in a past life) is aspiring to immortality, but an evil curse is keeping him from enlightenment.

And that's really all there is to the story. Most of the film's running time is comprised of inventive body-horror, vomit, corpses with a slick coating of squirming maggots, and other images that turn your stomach while startling you with their creativity. In counterpoint to these grossout scenes, the film signifies spiritual depth with Buddhist temple interiors, soaring chorales, and prismatic flashes of light. Somehow the sacred moments are just as psychedelic as the hordes of alligator skulls and surreal visual effects of the horror scenes.

Boxer's Omen features an array of antagonists. There's a black magician with a frizzy permed Afro who wears Gene Simmons makeup. To power his spells, he gobbles down an endless array of vile things. His occult rituals seem to be inspired by actual Thai black magic. There's a Nepali dancing temptress whose manner of dress calls to mind Princess Leia in Jabba's palace. And of course there's Bolo Yeung, who only appears in a couple of scenes. His big rubbery muscles make another memorable visual effect.

Probably my favorite aspect of Boxer's Omen is the sense of travel. The hero journeys first to Thailand, then to Nepal. In Kathmandu, street vendors sell their wares, ranging from Nepali sausages and colorful clothing to painted wooden monster-masks. A temple's exterior walls are carved to resemble fornicating couples. The filmmakers are careful to show that the Buddhist temples of Nepal have different architecture, different music, different art styles, and different rituals from the temples of Thailand. This makes the film deeper and more interesting. I came away from the movie with a genuine sense that I'd been on a voyage.

Some of the lighting and composition is stunning. Sublime. A Buddha statue sits serenely, lit in an orange-red glow, while ashes drift down in slow motion. Buddhist monks in orange linen robes perform a sacred ceremony on a giant reclining statue of a Buddha's face; the Buddha's eye lights up and glows with unearthly fires, while a young tree grows from the statue's forehead, glowing.

Recommended.

**Brave and the Evil (Taiwan, 1971: Jimmy Wang Yu)** - This is a surprisingly good movie, considering the age, the budget, and the simplistic plot line. Namely: Evil bandits kill the entire Hung Escort, including poppa Hung, and steal the 500,000 silver taels they were escorting. The elder Hung is a mighty swordsman, but falls victim to the big boss bad guy's demon rod, a nifty combination poker and Swiss Army Knife affair, after a lengthy knockdown drag-out opening battle.

Cue impetuous vengeful daughter Hung, skilled in dual knifeplay, and hell bent on killing the guys who offed her pappy. Good guy Jimmy Wang Yu introduces himself by casually flipping out of a tavern to save a blissfully unaware child from the thundering hooves of the aforementioned vengeful daughter's horse as she leaves town on her mission of vengeance. She's too busy being vengeful and impetuous to see the child, but it matters not, because Jimmy saves the kid, and her lollipop. Ms Hung heads off to bad guy mountain while Jimmy stoically finishes his tea.

Hurrah!

Naturally, Wang Yu is an incognito heroic kung fu master, known throughout the region as Iron Palm, who just happens to be heading the same way as vengeful daughter Hung. When they meet again, at a cartstop along the way, they have a brief comedy tussle, before casually battering a few dozen of the local thugs into the ground and joining forces to combat the nefarious evildoers.

It might sound cheesy and a bit predictable, but this is one of those old school kung fu movies that just gets better and better as it progresses. The acting is pretty good, and the grand finale is well over a quarter of an hour of swish kung fu and fancy swordplay with oceans of blood being spilt by the evil minions foolish enough to mix it with Jimmy Wang Yu.

I've got a ropey bootleg DVD which looks slightly worse than a beat up VHS, with "occasional" subtitles and crunchy sound. It's nearly an authentic Friday night chop socky fleapit vibe, and it's quite possible that I might have whooped a couple of times.

See it if you can. It's kinda charming in an innocent way, and Jimmy Wang Yu is usually worth watching. It sometimes feels like a Ringo Lam or John Woo heroic bloodshed movie that's been hurled back in time a few hundred years. Maybe they grew up watching Wang Yu movies too?

**Brave Archer Part 1 (Hong Kong, 1977: Chang Cheh)** - The first episode in a four part series that really only serves to introduce the main characters. The story certainly doesn't progress as far as to actually depict any archery.

With an awesome cast list 'The Brave Archer' puts them all to good use bombarding the viewer with character after character. The story basically follows the exploits of Fu Sheng, seeking revenge against the man who killed his father (aren't they all), but facing many strange encounters along the way. The story is probably going somewhere but it's too early to say quite where. This episode does come to some kind of sensible conclusion but many plot threads are left unresolved.

The action isn't quite as frequent or as prolonged as in other Shaws films but what there is works well and Robert Tai's debut as lead action director shows much potential. Fu Sheng is competent but is probably overshadowed by the likes of Li Yi Min and Wang Lung Wei. He does, however, carry that charisma that makes all of his performances enjoyable.

**Brave Archer 3 (Hong Kong, 1981: Chang Cheh) – aka Blast of the Iron Palm; Kung Fu Warlords 3** - The Brave Archer 3' is the final part of Chang Cheh's adaptation of Jin Yong's 'Legend of the Condor Heroes'. An adaptation that is quite faithful to the original source material. There are of course some subtle changes and omissions as are common with big screen adaptations from literary works. Perhaps the biggest omission from this series is the presence of Genghis Khan who was a major character in the novel. However since his character has little effect on the main narrative, it is not such a detrimental omission. In fact another major character may have even made 'The Brave Archer' an even more challenging viewing experience.

A painting that Tsing (Fu Sheng) and Ying (Niu Niu) discovered in the previous instalment, was found to contain information on the whereabouts of General Yue's Posthumous book. It states that the book is located in the Iron Palm Clan's headquarters. While retrieving the book Ying is seriously wounded as she is struck from behind by Iron Palm Clan leader Qiu Qian Ren (Lo Mang). On escape they come across the hut of Auntie Yee (Ching Li), who's hospitality is cut short when she discovers who Ying's father is. She does however tell them to find Southern King Emperor Duan Zhi Xing (Ti Lung) who has the power to save her. After making their way up the mountain and having to pass Duan's four disciples one by one, Duan agrees to help her against his disciples wishes. It becomes apparent that by saving Ying, Duan will lose his internal power for five years making him vulnerable to attack. This is in fact Auntie Yee's plan as she holds a deep rooted grudge against Duan.

Of the three films in the 'The Brave Archer' trilogy, this instalment feels more like a solitary film. The pacing is much more leisurely and the new characters are not thrown in at breakneck speed. It also leaves more time for character development as it spends much time exploring the background of Emperor Duan. In many ways Ti Lung and Li Ching have the central roles as these are the ones that are given depth and emotion. So one might think that this might be the best in the trilogy. Not necessarily so.

As I have already mentioned the pacing is much more leisurely. And it certainly feels more leisurely. If viewed straight after the first two instalments it feels downright slow in comparison. It could be argued that this is not helped by the action being more sparse than in the previous instalments. In fact the vast majority of the action is left for the final reel, cue a showcase for the Venoms, and executed in typical Venoms style. Yes all five Venoms can be seen in the final showdown, which has the rare distinction of Sun Chien wielding weapons.

There is even more references to Taoist formations than in the previous two films. This becomes quite mind boggling, when Taoist mathematic formulas and solutions are churned out at such a velocity, that surely only a genius could keep up with. This is an aspect of the film that makes it less accessible to western audiences. 'The Brave Archer 3' also sports an unsatisfactory ending. While it may tie up the issues created in this instalment, it appears to ignore most of the events created in the previous two instalments. This is one of the factors which makes it feel like more of a standalone film. Thankfully the final chapter spills over into 'The Brave Archer and His Mate'. It therefore could be argued that it is in fact a quadrilogy as opposed to a trilogy. However only the first half hour of 'The Brave Archer and His Mate' covers the end of 'Legend of the Condor Heroes'. The decision to not include the ending of the source material was most likely so that 'The Brave Archer 3' would end with a big action set piece in the tradition of the genre.

Overall, I felt that 'The Brave Archer 3' is the weakest of the trilogy despite some of its traditional narrative improvements. The three films are of course better if viewed as one long film, but that is partially the undoing of this third instalment due to its comparatively slow pacing following the hectic earlier instalments.

**Bravest Fist (Hong Kong, 1974: Luk Bong)** - Vicious gangster Master Lu (Someno Yokio) has a small town living in fear of him and his gang. While the government stands by and does nothing, Martial Artist Hu Min-Chen(Chan Wai Man) decides to deal with the gangsters with his own brand of justice.

There's non stop action in this old school independent basher directed by the late Luk Bong. This film might not be a classic of the genre but it sure packs a punch with real life tough guy Chan Wai Man on top form as the righteous and brave Hu Min-Chen. The film opens up with three crooks on the run, two of whom are chained together. At first I thought it might be a Kung Fu version of The Defiant One's, but that's certainly not the case. One of chained crooks played by Someno Yokio decides to ditch his partner when he learns he wishes to go straight. Meanwhile the third crook played by Hong Kong veteran actor Fong Yau, is on the run on his own. He gets to a small house and is about to change his clothes when Kong Do arrives on the scene sparking a desperate fight between the two. Fong Yau is no match for Kong Do so he runs away. Now we never see Fong Yau's character again for some reason?. Looking at the run time of the MillCreek print at 1-hour 14-mins I'd say some narrative scenes have been edited out?. When you watch the rest of the film it does give you the impression that there was more to the story. Or it could simply be bad film making?. Either way I was hoping Yau had more screen time because he always puts on a good performance. This still didn't stop me from enjoying the movie and the action never really lets up until the finale.

*"Damn it, I didn't know I could be beat by a store manager"*

Now onto the action scenes handled by the team of John Cheung(Snake In The Monkeys Shadow) & Chan Wai Man. This was John Cheung's first effort as fight choreographer according to HKMDB and he does a decent enough job. Chan had previously tried his hand at choreography for The Owl(1974). Its hard to say which of the two actors contributed the most to the action but overall it works. This being a mid 70's basher film means there's no crisp, flowing choreography on display. The fight scenes have been stripped down to the basic blocks and counter attacks but its not all endless arm flailing thankfully. This old style of fight action can sometimes get repetitive or boring but I didn't find that to be the case here. That said the style wont suit every Kung Fu film fan. There's some nice moves on display and Chan Wai Man throws some neat looking western boxing style punches. One good example of this is when Hu Min-Chen fights off the thugs at the docks. Chan does a good job of convincing you hes punching for real at times. Another highlight see's Chan Wai Man saving Dean Shek's character from becoming a punch bag for the local gang. He even gets to display a few nice kicks, which I think should have been used more often. While there's no weapons use the brief encounter between Kong Do & Fong Yau makes use of multiple props such as ladder, tables and ceramic pots. A style Jackie Chan would make his own and take to new levels in later years.

While the fight choreography might not be top notch they keep a consistent quality throughout the movie. There's nothing special about the climax but it does deliver in terms of action. One of the best parts of Dean Shek performance is he keeps the humor to a minimum. There is some comedy but it doesn't ruin the film or get in the way like some of Shek's other performances. He even get involved in some of the action as he faces off against the

evil Master Lu, while Hu Min-Chen deals with Kong Do and his lackeys. This might just be his the most serious role Ive watched him perform. John Cheung also has a minor part in the film as one of the assassins hired by Master Lu. The other hired killer is played by Wong Kwok Leung(Blind Fist Of Bruce Lee), neither of them really gets to shine sadly but they make a formidable duo for the films hero to deal with in the finale.

Actress's Lisa Cheung & Paula Tsui are welcome additions to the cast. They don't get involved in any of the fights but do play a key part in the story. Paula plays the daughter of the rice shop owner who Hu Min-Chen works for. When her father is killed by Master Lu, Chen lets her and boyfriend(Kenneth Tsang) stay at his mothers house. Lisa Cheung is a good actress but she doesn't get that much screen time. She plays Chen's sister who spends most of her time caring for their sick mother. Kenneth Tsang(The Killer) puts on his usual decent performance. His character is likable enough he just doesn't get much chance to shine in this one. When Hu Min-Chen decides to finally deal with the gang, he ask Tsang to look after his mother keeping him out of the action. Someno Yukio(Gambling For Head) puts on a great performance as the emotionless scheming gangster Master Lu. He does such a good job its hard to imagine him playing any other kind of role. Just wish there was more back story about his character. One minute he's on the run then suddenly he's running a successful crime syndicate. Like Ive mentioned already, judging by the run time this version of the film may have some narrative scenes missing.

One thing that separates this film from a lot other Martial Arts movies of the era is the soundtrack. Most independent old school films are light on music. Or they tend to use the same few tracks over and over again. This film is a bit different in that respect. They do borrow heavily from Ennio Morrcone with some use of the track Per Un Pugno Di Dollar from a Fistful Of Dollars. The rest of the score had some familiar tracks but nothing I could put a name to. While the score is a little different, don't expect the kind of polished soundtrack you would get from a Shaw Brothers or Golden Harvest production. The print released by MillCreek is in widescreen but suffers from some bad dubbing. The picture quality is watchable with the exception of one fight filmed in a dimly lit room.

Chan Wai Man proves early in his career that he can carry film even if it doesn't have great production values. The fight scenes might not be the classiest but they have a nice grounded gritty charm to them. Just don't expect too much from the film, the draw backs of a low budget can clearly be seen. Bravest Fist is no classic and the cast have appeared in better movies. Yet I still recommend this film to fans of the cast and anyone who likes their old school films action packed.

**Bravest Revenge, The (Taiwan, 1970: Chien Lung)** - The Bravest Revenge begins with action and from that point on only pauses occasionally for some terse dialogue and minimal plot development before the next action set piece kicks in. Director Lung seems to go by the well-honed film theory that if the actors aren't moving and someone isn't being killed you are just wasting your audience's time. It was certainly alright with me as I hadn't seen a wuxia in a while and this felt pretty good. Lung is also a big proponent of the zoom, often for no particular purpose that can be discerned. In an interview, Eric Tsang said of his first directorial outings that using zoom shots back then was considered the sign of a knowledgeable director but admits it looks terrible now. Yes, they do. Yet this is only an amusing distraction in a field of death.

Chau Mutien (Yee Yuen) has escaped from prison and is up to his old tricks again of ravaging the countryside. Brother Hsih (Ma Kei) who captured Chau the first time is brought out of retirement to bring him down again, but Chau has been practicing for this moment and with his powerful sword he is able to slay Hsih in front of his four children – three sons and one daughter. He considers killing them as well but lets them live and tells them to come back in five years when they are ready to fight him. Big mistake. The four (Chan Bo-leung, Sit Hon, Man Chung-san and Polly Shang-kwan) each trains with a different master for the requisite period of time and they learn all the basics like walking on water and catching a knife between their teeth. In exactly five years, they gather in Blue Dragon Town to revenge their father.

They find the area very much changed though – Chau is a huge kingpin now with more minions working for him than Donald Trump. The four immediately get to work and begin whittling away at all the black attired followers of Chau (being dressed in black turns out to be a one-way ticket to an early departure from the film). The four are joined by a mysterious fellow named Tsai (Tien Peng) who seems pretty handy with a sword – but then he should be as he is the Sword King. But even though the minions fall like leaves in a wind storm, Chau shows that he is more than a match for all five of them – even at the same time! Tsai realizes that he needs the Sun Sword to defeat Chau and goes off on a mission to track it down – while the four siblings decide they can't wait for him and need to give Chau one last challenge. They wade into his well protected fortress and the killing begins in earnest. The action choreography is pretty good in this one with an enormous amount of acrobatic jumps that appear to be very much influenced by the way King Hu shot his action scenes – using trampolines and quick edited shots. At times it is a bit

absurd as a character jumps out of one frame and in the next is sitting in a tree a mile away – but over all it is impressive, fast moving and lots of fun.

**Breakout From Oppression (Hong Kong, 1978: Yang Fan, Lau Kar-Leung & Gordon Liu) - aka Deadly Strike** - Also known as Breakout From Oppression and credited to three directors (including Lau Kar-Leung and lead Gordon Liu), that fact is debatable considering the simplicity and inept filmmaking on display here (think our latter two directors had more to do with action than narrative personally). Gordon Liu (with hair) witnesses a murder and subsequently takes a job with a factory owner in a dispute with two men (Dean Shek and Paul Chun) he saw leaving the murder scene. But the truth is perhaps not as clear as that. You'd think with the elite kung fu-talent involved that this low budget and drab looking genre-effort would at least sparkle action-wise. It's there but is light years away from any impact the Lau Brothers made at Shaw Brothers before and subsequently. The whole affair reeks more of the brothers along with Gordon having incredibly limited time and resources for quality choreography but regardless, nothing pops here. Also with Fung Hak-On.

**Broken Oath (Hong Kong, 1977: Jeong Chang-hwa)** - The movie begins with a woman (Ho Mei) being taken by ship to a island prison for women (the movie is set during the Qing Dynasty). Her cellmate is a former pickpocket named Thousand Hands (Wang Lai, *Back Alley Princess* and *Snake Shadow, Lama Fist*) who shows her the ropes and takes care of her. The woman turns out to be pregnant and on the day she goes into labor, she tells her friend of her sob story: She's widow of the late General Liu (Kwan Shan, *The Himalayan*), who was murdered by four of his subordinates. After the assassination, one of them raped her and had her turned over to the authorities for attempted murder. Upon giving birth, the woman declares that her child will be filled with the hate necessary to seek revenge for General Liu's death and her violation. The woman then promptly dies following her declaration.

Thousand Hands decides to take care of the baby and is able to leave the prison (don't ask my how; the movie doesn't explain it) and go back to society. The reformed thief doesn't want the young one to go around seeking revenge, so she takes her to the nearest Shaolin monastery for the female abbot (Jeon Shook) to raise. The little girl, dubbed "Pure Lotus" by the abbot, grows up to become Angela Mao (*Deep Thrust* and *The Legendary Strike*).

Lotus is a kung fu dynamo, as we would expect a character played by Angela Mao to be, but she has something of a fierce side, not too unlike Gordon Liu's character from *8 Diagram Pole Fighter*. This becomes especially problematic when Lotus skips out of her Buddhist recitation class to practice kung fu and find herself the target of a trio of rapists. She beats two of them to death and tortures the other one with her pet scorpions. The abbot catches her doing these decidedly un-Buddhist things and has her kicked out of the monastery.

Once in a while I read reviews of this film commenting on the title and observing that there is no "broken oath" to speak of in this movie. Well, the Chinese title of the film is "Po Jie." "Po" translates as "broken." "Jie" translates as "Oath," but it's not the "I swear that I'll avenge you" type of oath, but it refers to the monastic oath taken by monks who enter the Shaolin Temple. With that in mind, one can conclude that the title refers to Lotus' being kicked out of the Shaolin temple because of her breaking the rules that monks, nuns, and laymen vowed to follow upon their entry there.

Arriving at her godmother's house, Lotus finds out the truth about her parents and decides to take revenge.

Teaming up with a young protégé of her godmother named Ah Shu (Ha Yue, *Dragon Reloaded* and *Kung Fu Mahjong 3*), Lotus sets her sights on Hou (Chiu Hung, *Vengeance is a Golden Blade* and *King Boxer*), one of the murderers who is now the owner of the local gambling den. Lotus shows up at the den and challenges Hou to a game, offering herself as a prize if he wins. He does, but he figures that she let him because she had something planned. Well, she does, and before Hou can do anything to stop her, Lotus introduces her scorpions to him in a rather unpleasant manner. (Random obs: Keep an eye out in this scene for a young Corey Yuen as one of Hou's bodyguards)

Both Lotus and Ah Shu show up at Hou's funeral a few days later. Among the attendees is a strong-looking fellow named Chen (Leung Siu-Lung, *The Gallants* and *Call Me Dragon*). Chen professes to be a friend of Hou's and even rats out Lotus and Ah Shu to Hou's men after he discovers that his wallet has been stolen.

A big chase ensues, with Lotus briefly fighting Chen and another stranger (Kuo Cheng-Yu of *Seven Indignant*), their fights being interrupted by the appearance of a mysterious wanderer named Yuan Sing (Michael Chan Wai-Man,

*Spirits of Bruce Lee and Shaolin Hand Lock*). Meanwhile, Hou's men track Ah Shu to Thousand Hand's house, where they proceed to torture them until Lotus returns to give them a taste of Shaolin kung fu laced with scorpion venom. Before Hou's second-in-command expires, though, he tells Lotus where Tou (Fong Yau, *Jeet Kune the Claws and the Supreme Kung Fu* and *Dragon Lives Again*), another one of the murderers is hiding: a brothel.

It looks like it's time for some non-salacious undercover work for Lotus. Posing as a poor girl being sold into prostitution by her mother seems to work quite handily for Lotus. No sooner has she gotten in is she invited by Tou for a test drive before he starts passing her to his clients. Lotus is about to show Tou why the only good arachnid is a dead one when Chen shows up again to spoil things, ratting her out to Tou.

He then sends his henchman (Dean Shek, *Drunken Master* and *A Better Tomorrow 2*) a message out to General Tsao (Cheung Pooi-Saan, *Girls in the Tiger Cage* and *Angels with Iron Fists*), the man who originally ordered the hit on Lotus' dad. The message is intercepted by Chen, whose identity is still not known at the moment. Meanwhile Lotus has her arms full with Tou's flunkies (one of whom is co-choreographer Tyrone Hsu) and Tou himself, he's as good a fighter as he is a womanizer. During the prolonged scuffle, both Chen and Yuan Sing show up to give Lotus some pointers. She succeeds in killing Tou, but not before he poisons her and puts her in a coma.

Lotus is rushed to the Shaolin monastery where the abbot informs Ah Shu and Thousand Hands that only a hermitical herbalist named Chifeng can cure her. They find said herbalist, who initially refuses their request. He recants and no sooner does he find out the identity of his patient does he reveal himself as Wen, the third of the four murderers. Unlike the last two, however, Wen has been fairly penitent for what he had done and sees helping Lotus as a way to partially atone for his mistakes. Lotus is indeed healed, but soon Lotus will soon have to deal with the fourth killer, General Tsao, and the mysterious twosome that is Chen and his compatriot.

*Broken Oath* is supposed to be the Chinese re-imagining of the Japanese chambara classic *Lady Snowblood*. And when considers that *Lady Snowblood* is one of the main inspirations for Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* films, then you can say that this movie is indirectly related to Tarantino's two-part epic. Actually, once you see the weapon that Sammo Hung uses in the big finale—a pair of star-like knives connected via a cord that can be swung like a flail—you're likely to say, "Wait a minute, that looks like Go-Go Yubari's weapon" and draw the connection. Well, that and the fact that the story is about a woman getting revenge by killing off her enemies one by one should be enough to make the connections clear. That said, I haven't watched all of the *Kill Bill* movies or *Lady Snowblood*, so I really can't make a comparison between all these films.

Taken on its own merits and compared to Angela Mao's other films, this one is really a winner. The cast is pretty solid, full of familiar faces and less familiar ones. Angela Mao needs no introduction and any movie with her in it is likely to be better for her presence. The only martial arts actresses that could meet her intensity, acting-wise, were Hsu Feng and Yukari Oshima, and this is a definitely a movie that thrives on Angela's intense (and occasionally sadistic) performance.

Much like *The Himalayan*, Angela is backed up by a superkicker, this time in the form of Leung Siu-Lung (who made a few Bruceploitation films under the moniker Bruce Liang). Leung was arguably a better actor than Dorian Tan and was enough of his own choreographer that he never allowed his skills to be wasted in his movies, nor did he allow himself to be a one-trick pony. Even in this film, where he's clearly putting on a few pounds, his roundhouse and spin kicks are both fast and powerful and compliment Angela's fighting quite nicely.

The main villain is played by real-life Triad member Michael Chan Wai-Man. Like Leung Siu-Lung, Michael Chan was trained in Northern styles of kung fu, including the Northern Eagle Claw, which both actors use in their final duel together. Moreover, apparently both actors have participated in numerous real brawls, because apparently there were places in Hong Kong where young Triad punks would routinely challenge martial arts actors to fights just to see if they were the real thing. Chan's fake wig and beard make him rather imposing in this film and, although it's not his best performance, it still looks good on his résumé.

Rounding out the supporting cast are Sammo Hung and Han Ying-Chieh, who show up as General Tsao's bodyguards. Sammo Hung played supporting roles in practically all of Angela Mao's Golden Harvest-era films, usually as the villain. Here is no different, and we get to see Sammo with a fake beard and the top of his head shaved like a Japanese samurai. Han Ying-Chieh, who was obviously getting older at this point, puts in one of his best fighting performances that I've seen from him. I think it helps that he's not choreographing himself this time, but has two stalwart action directors putting him through the paces.

And who are those two stalwart action directors: Why, they're Yuen Woo-Ping (*The Matrix* and *Iron Monkey*) and Tyrone Hsu Hsia (*Lion vs. Lion* and *Hell's Wind Staff*). Yuen Woo-Ping, who coincidentally (or not) choreographed *Kill*

Bill, was still up and coming by 1977, although he was coming along extremely well that year. He was already working at Seasonal Films alongside legendary producer Ng See-Yuen and Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee and was a year away from becoming recognized as being among the best in the business with the landmark success of his Jackie Chan vehicles *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *The Drunken Master*. Tyrone Hsu was a apparently a close friend of the Yuen Clan and assisted Woo-Ping on *The Drunken Master*, in addition to directing and choreographing a number of second-string (albeit martially superior) Shaw Brothers vehicles. The difference between Sammo Hung's and Yuen Woo-Ping's choreography styles is quite evident if you compare this film to *The Himalayan*. Sammo Hung generally kept Angela Mao and her co-stars fairly weaponless (except for a few katanas here and there in her anti-Japanese films) and emphasized Mao's open-handed skills and head-kicking greatness. Even when Sammo was starting off in the game, his ability to choreograph a good hand-to-hand fight was second only to Bruce Lee himself.

Yuen Woo-Ping and Hsu Hsia, however, opt to shake things up a bit more this time. Instead of focusing on Angela's hapkido skills, they showcase her more traditional kung fu forms (although she still gets in some good boots) and weapons. Her main weapons include the pole, a pair of short swords, and some metal yo-yos that she keeps hidden on her person. Moreover, the other characters get to use varied weapons as well. Han Ying-Chieh gets a bottle of wine that he uses to spit fire and steel-toed boots, Sammo gets his aforementioned knife/flail weapon, and a number of other characters use sabers, darts, and claws in their fights. The fights are definitely more creative than in most of Angela's previous films, which is a plus. They also are a little less mannered than what Woo-Ping and Hsia would do with Jackie Chan the following year. The ending is a totally awesome affair in which every character that isn't dead at that point gets into it, leading to several different individual fights.

The two duels worth mentioning are Angela Mao vs. Cheung Pooi-Saan and Leung Siu-Lung vs. Michael Chan. In the former, Cheung confronts Angela without saying a word. Suddenly, a dozen fighters that are dressed like him, but wearing masks, pop up from behind him. Aesthetically, it's a beautiful sequence and very reminiscent of the third boss (the Green Ninja) of the classic game *Bad Dudes vs. Dragon Ninja*. Angela gets cut up pretty bad in the duel, to the point that you really wonder if she'll make it to the end of the movie.

The latter, according to an interview with Leung Siu-Lung that I read, was actually improvised on the spot by Leung and Chan because the director, Jeong Chang-hwa (who also directed the seminal *Five Fingers of Death*), couldn't make up his mind on what he wanted. So Leung and Chan just made up their own choreography as they went along and it looks great. Both men use the Eagle style (Northern Eagle) while Leung Siu-Lung throws in his own patented kicks. He uses mainly front, roundhouse, and spin-kicks, with a few aerial kicks to keep things nice.

The more I write this review, the more I want to watch more...MORE Angela Mao movies. I also want to watch more Leung Siu-Lung movies. In any case, this is really a must-see film for all action fans. It has Angela Mao at her fighting best (and dressed sort of like Chun Li in one of the fights—perhaps she was a precursor to her), a great display of Leung Siu-Lung's kicking skills, is a direct ancestor to *Kill Bill*, features some great early choreography from the legendary Yuen Woo-Ping, and is just an butt-kicking film all around. Highly recommended.

**Bronze Head and Steel Arm (Taiwan, 1972: Ching Sheng-En)** - Tien Peng fights in a gambling house and, as he is very strong with his "steel arms" skill, the owner of the gambling house (the real Chiao Chiao's husband in life, Wong Chung Shun, if I'm not mistaken) proposes him to work for him. Then we see Kong Ban saving a man who is trying to commit suicide; they become friends and the man explains to Kong Ban why he was trying to kill himself: he, his men and his wife (Chiao Chiao) have been attacked by Wong Chung Shun and his men, and all his men were killed. In order to save him, his wife has agreed to become Wong Chung Shun concubine. Kong Ban decides to help the man to get his wife back and he fights in the gambling house.

Later, he meets Tien Peng and they fight each other and then, become friends and when they return to Chiao Chiao's husband's house, they find that he has been killed by Wong Chung Shun because this one has discovered that Chiao Chiao had paid a visit to him and had given him some money. Then, Kong Ban is received at Tien Peng's house where live his mother and his sister and he befriends with Tien Peng's sister. Then, when he discovers that Kong Ban and Tien Peng became friends, Wong Chung Shun tries to make them fight each other and, while he has invited Tien Peng to dinner, he sends his men to attack Kong Ban at Tien Peng's house. As it's not his house, Kong Ban tells the men that they are going to fight far away from the house. But, while he fights, some other Wong Chung Shun's men attack Tien Peng's mother and sister and kill them. When Kong Ban returns to the house, he discovers the corpses and, at the same moment, Tien Peng arrives and believes that Kong Ban is the assassin. They fight once again and it's only because Chiao Chiao arrives and explain them that they have been trapped by Wong

Chung Shun that they stop fighting. The three of them plan to trap Wong Chung Shun and they finally succeed in getting revenge on him.

Once again, it's a very good movie, with great fights from Kong Ban and Tien Peng. And once again, Chiao Chiao has been underused in this movie : she has only two fights in the movie, one in the beginning, but very short, and the other at the very end of the movie, and it seems to me that it has been cut !! Worth watching, even twice than once !!

**Brotherhood of Heroes, A (Taiwan, 1980: Ulysses Au) – Happy Hero; Knights of Misadventure - A BROTHERHOOD OF HEROES** is a dark and scuzzy kung fu flick from Taiwan. Action fans will be disappointed by the lack of hard-hitting fight scenes here, and the ones which do occur are strictly routine, with hits that never connect and lots of jumping around with very little impact. It's a period-set piece in which a trio of wandering swordsmen-type heroes discover a sinister conspiracy at the imperial court, but the plotting is hackneyed and the twists well choreographed in advance. The one and only Barry Chan stars, alongside Jackie Chen and a cameoing Chen Sing, who really deserves better.

**Bruce and Dragon Fist (South Korea, 1977: Shim Wu-Seob) - BRUCE AND DRAGON FIST** is another very poor quality martial arts film made in South Korea. It's about a good guy who wants revenge against some bad guys so spends most of his time kicking his way through the supporting cast. There's little more plot to it than that. The version available for English viewers is of a very poor quality, with bad dubbing throughout and picture quality that renders the fight scenes near unwatchable, although they're sub-par and few and far between anyway. Music is stolen from JAWS and Johnny Mathis, while Bruce Le plays his usual Bruce Lee imitation and makes a few hollers and whoops along the way.

**Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1977: James Nam, Cho Seong) - a.k.a Ching Wu & Shaolin Kung Fu, Fist Of Fury Part 2** - The Japanese have over run China and the Karate mad General Yae Ho(Bae Su Cheon), is hellbent on closing all the Kung Fu schools. Meanwhile the patriotic and brave Lee Ching-Ling(Bruce Le), plans to take on the generals entire platoon, and anyone else who dare stand in his way. When things start to get too dangerous for the young fighter, his Master sends him to Korea to further master his fighting skills. The enraged Japanese general orders his men to pursue Lee Ching-Ling and bring his body back in a bag. Can our hero survive? or will his enemies prevail?.

*"You still got a long way to go with your Kung Fu Ching-Ling, you have to remember Martial Arts practice and philosophy are the same, the spirit is revealed through the power of actions". (Chan Sing)*

Another action packed fight fest from the P.T Insantra Film.Co starring the electrically charged Bruce Le. Filmed entirely in Korea, this movie has one impressive cast for an independent Hong Kong production. This more than makes up for the small budget and almost none existent story/plot. Once again the Japanese are portrayed as the evil wrong doers, who persist on making life hell for the Chinese population. Compared with many of the other films of this type that came out in the post Fist Of Fury(1972) era, its not too offensive. Most of the films run time is made up of fight scenes, which is both a positive and a negative. This is something which I'll get back to later in the review. Of all the Bruce Le movies I have watched, this one features one of his best fighting performances. With this in mind we will move quickly onto the subject of the movies fights scenes.

According to the films credit sequence the action director Tang Tak-Cheung(Super Power, Tiger Over Wall) was an apprentice of Lau Ka Leung?. While I would not be surprised by this, I am unable to confirm if its actually true?. He's certainly a very capable fight choreographer, while the action here might not be his greatest work, it still delivers. This was after all only his second attempt in the role of action director, previously sharing those duties on Mantis Fist with Chan Lau. He would later improve and went on to choreograph a further twenty one movies. The styles on display here are mostly Karate and Chinese Kung Fu based. Some of the styles appear to have been made up, such as the one Bolo's character uses. He performs an odd Monkey style where he crouches low to the floor and flails his arms around a lot. Not one of his most wildest roles, but certainly one of the oddest characters he's ever portrayed. While this might not be Bolo best Martial Arts display it's certainly a memorable role. Bolo looks the biggest Ive ever seen him here, with a back wide enough to block out the sun. It's a good job they were shooting this movie during



the winter months. Along with Kong Do, Bruce Cheung Mong and Lee Hang, he forms a gang of fighters hired by the Japanese.

One of the high lights of the movie see's this gang face off against Chan Sing, who is on top form here. Wire work is featured in many of the fights and this encounter is no exception. A lot of the action is very grounded but there is also an element of super human ability. Bruce Le is taking on the entire Japanese army, so you cant take things too seriously. Chan Sing is excellent in the role of the old master who teaches Lee Ching-Ling, with the training mostly focused on pressure points. During one of the training scenes filmed halfway up a mountain, Le practices what appear to be shop mannequins. With black dots to highlight the pressure points. Not sure how or who carried those halfway up a mountain side so they could train with them?. Some prints of this film remove a lot of the footage connected with the pressure points. Luckily the print I watched restores these sequences and some of the others that got trimmed out for certain releases. This print is presented in widescreen with the missing shots inserted in pan and scan. This was very handy for spotting the cut segments. Chan Sing's fight with Kong Do and his lackeys suffered quite a few cuts, it must have made little sense in the censored print.

Like I mentioned earlier the facts there's a lot of action is not entirely a good thing. Watching this film for the second time I felt some of the fight scene did get a bit tiresome. The last half hour is pretty much one encounter after another. While I didn't feel this way upon my first viewing, it did get a bit numbing the second time round. That said they have put a lot of energy and creativity into some of the fights, and you cant describe the finale as boring. The Japanese in a last ditch effort to stop the Chinese super fighter Ching Ling, hire a father and son team who kill for a living. The pair both have white hair, with the fathers beard being the only way to tell them apart. Both are armed with short staffs that have a silver claw attached to the end of them. They soon realize their not a match for the films hero and revert to their secret weapons. Only Ching's one step ahead and unleashes his nunchaku fury on the pair, to counter their chain link weapons. Not the greatest Kung Fu movie showdown, but it never gets dull. I'm not sure who played this family fighting team?, even the HKMDB is unable to identify them. There's also some early use of X-Ray bone breaking special FX, which also appeared in the Bruce Le action classic *The Ninja Strikes Back*(1982). This is the earliest example of the idea I've ever seen in a movie.

The ever reliable James Nam(Little Superman) is on fine form here with some decent Martial Arts display. He plays the Korean Master Po Sia Lam, who Ching Lung is sent to. He gets to show off some really nice looking staff skills in this one too. Nam co-directed the production with Cho Seong, and while hes no King Hu he still does a capable enough job. With two directors it also impossible to say who is responsible for what we see onscreen. Kim Jeong-Nan(Snake & Crane Arts Of Shaolin) pulls no punches in her excellent performance as Po Sia Lam's daughter. She isn't given too much to do in term of fighting, but her character is a welcome addition to the cast. This movie is pretty serious in tone despite some intentional & unintentional comedy. Kim Jeong is not just there for the hero to fall in love with. She's an active part of the Chinese/Korean resistance and her character reflects that.

Special mention should also go to actor Bae Su Cheon(*The Blazing Ninja*) who plays a superb movie villain. I cant say he's a superb Martial Arts movie villain because he doesn't actually perform any Karate or Kung Fu. That said he does a really good job portraying the patriotic and slightly crazed Japanese general. He not entirely ruthless like most villains in this type of story, and he doesn't believe in using guns. According to his character its against the warrior code. This is a clever way for the filmmakers to not have to deal with the problem of fire arms in a Kung Fu movie. Especially when you have an army that armed with rifles as the villains. Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu also features some stunning scenery, you could not ask for a better back drop to the action. The snow and mist covered mountains of Korea make for a great location.

Overall I'd recommend this movie only to fans of Bruce Le, the rest of the cast are just their as supporting players. Huang Kin Lung might be more known by his clone name(Bruce Le), but his swollen knuckles show he was a genuine Martial Artist and tough guy with his own set of skills. Chan Sing has nice role but it's more of an extended cameo, but a good one at that. Bolo and Kong Do nearly steal the film with their antics but again they are not the focus of the story. This is a Bruce Le movie, and with the physical performance he puts on here he deserves to be the star. We do get the Bruce Lee style hand gesturing and odd thumb swipe, but overall the Little Dragon mannerisms are kept to a minimum. While I wouldn't describe this film as an absolute must own title, I'm sure fans of Huang Kin Lung will enjoy seeing him knock the spit out his foes.

**Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu Part 2 (Hong Kong, 1977: James Nam, Cho Seong) - a.k.a Bruce & The Shaolin Fist, Ching Wu & Shaolin Kung Fu 2** - Lee Ching-Lung is taken in by an a mysterious old master, after being shot by the Japanese. Meanwhile General Kawaski(Bae Su-Cheon) is still hellbent on getting revenge for the death of his son. He

hires Chinese Kung Fu expert Shi Shaw and his men, to help him bring in the courageous freedom fighter Lee Ching-Lung.

*"The Bastard still lives, what will we do?"*

Oddly this patriotic sequel to Bruce and Shaolin Kung Fu was released before the first movie actually-came out. This is similar to what happened with the first two **Missing In Action** movies starring **Chuck Norris**. The sequel somehow got released before the first movie. I'm not sure how this happened?, but it's clear the movies were released in the wrong order. Korean born Hong Kong film veteran **James Nam**, returns to the director's chair for this sequel. Sadly he doesn't have a role in the movie itself this time. This follow up lacks the faster pace of the original, and in my opinion it's the weaker of the two productions. Filmed in South Korea during the Autumn and Spring months, many of the same locations are used again here. Only this movie doesn't have as much star power on screen, but that's not the only drawback.

Tang Tak-Cheung who was the fight choreographer for the first movie is replaced by Tong Kam-Tong (*Bruce & Dragon Fist*). While the action on display is not all bad, it doesn't hold up to the choreography displayed in part one. Tong Kam has even been given a minor role as one of the Japanese lackeys, who gets killed off quickly. You cant be too hard on Tong Kam however, he was only an action director on four movies. Compare this to Tang Tak-Cheung, who had worked as a choreographer on over twenty three films. The print I watched is also full screen, which certainly doesn't improve the fight scenes.

Being a Korean production you would expect some decent kicking action. In a flashback sequence involving Kong Do and an old master, we are treated to some nice legwork. Unfortunately I cannot put a name to the crisp kickers face. Despite watching a fair amount of 70s Korean Kung Fu action, a lot of the cast members were faces I couldn't recognize. Hoped to see Korean regular Baek Hwang-Ki (*Martial Monks Of Shaolin Temple*) but even he doesn't appear in this one. There are two masters in the movie, one a bald headed priest character with a long beard. The other is a wild eyed hunch back with a limp. The actor who plays the hunchback fought Huang Kin Lung in the first movie, but only his face appears on the productions HKMDB page.

Both masters are pretty swift with their legs, but the action doesn't make the most of their physical skills. Lee Ching-Lung spends the first forty or so minutes inactive, as he recovers from his wounds. Which is not surprising since the Japanese filled him with enough lead to knock down an adult elephant. I don't think I've ever seen one of his screen characters spend so much time sat still. With Huang Kin-Lung normally leaping around on-screen with the energy of an ape, that's just found a huge stash of Colombian marching powder. You know he's back in action, when he stands up rips off his shirt, and holds his clenched fists high in the air. Action is an international language everyone understands, and you can see why Huang Kin-Lung was popular with audiences around the world.

Eventually the inevitable happens and Lee Ching-Lung catches up with his enemies. Pulling out all the stops as he literally goes ape in the finale. With monkey style, and a bird inspired animal style that words can't do justice. He's lethal on the ground and in the air, hitting people from all angles. Again the choreography is a mixed with both good and bad elements. There's a lot of unnecessary slow-motion especially in the film's final minutes. There's still nice moves from Huang Kin-Lung, the action is peppered with his short-range Wing Chun inspired strikes, blocks and blows. There's also a fighter with a pair of huge Sai, that would look more at home in the hands of Conan The Barbarian. Bae Su-Cheon as General Kawaski appears more over the top in this sequel, if that's even possible?. His screen presence and acting make up for his lack of Martial Arts skills. When he does get into any fights he simply swings his samurai sword around, and shouts about the samurai spirit.

Kong Do is his usual reliable self and one of the films positives. Hiding under a fake beard and a long white haired wig. There's nearly as many hair pieces in this movie as fights scenes. He was clearly brought in to perform the Martial Arts moves that actor Bae Su-Cheon couldn't provide. Actress Kim Jeong-Nan (*Snake & Crane Arts Of Shaolin*) is greatly underused. Apart from two other unidentifiable actress, she's only female in the entire story. Kim plays one of the masters daughters Lotus, but she never gets to perform any Martial Arts sadly.

The film's score has the usual *Enter The Dragon* soundtrack sound bites throughout. They have also lifted music from the opening theme of the old U.S.T.V series The Young & The Restless. Not that fans of this particular-genre would be expecting an original soundtrack. Overall *Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu Part 2* is not the worst entry in Hung Kin-Lung's filmography. It's also far from being one of his better efforts. If the same fight choreographer had returned it may have turned out better?. I still enjoyed watching it again for this review, and if you are big fan of Bruceploitation, you will want to check this movie out at some point.

**Bruce and the Iron Finger (Hong Kong, 1979: To Man-Bo) – aka Bruce Against the Iron Hand** - When Bruce Li steps out from the Kai Tak airport in his Bruce-haircut, shades, a big-labeled white suit and red shirt, you think "uh oh, another bad imitation". But surprisingly, he plays it straight---this is not really a Bruce Lee lookalike film. He uses a Taiwanese version of wing chun with some (average) kicks tossed in. It is, however, a typically campy mid-1970s chop socky complete with cooing flip-haired hookers, mop-headed thugs, bad camera work, etc. Bruce Leung steals the show with his somewhat smallish role as a dim mak stylist who can also kick like crazy. In fact, Leung's pacing and mannerisms out-Bruce Bruce Li's.

**Bruce and the Shaolin Bronzemen (Hong Kong, 1982: Joseph Kong)** - From the "creative" force behind the classic CLONES OF BRUCE LEE comes BRUCE AND THE SHAOLIN BRONZEMEN, a film that can hardly be considered Bruce Le's shining moment. While filled with fights and all other brands of weirdness, the film is definitely on the bottom end of the Bruceploitation scale.

Bruce Le stars as Wong Lung, a young man who heads to the city to find his Uncle Santos. In his possession, Wong Lung has 1/2 of a coin that when paired with the half held by Santos, it reveals the secret burial place of an equally secret treasure. Of course, time honored tradition states that if you have access to a buried treasure then someone out there wants to kill you to get a hold of it. Here the villain comes in the female form of Miss Sophie, an alluring crime queen who will stop at nothing to get the treasure. She unleashes a wide variety of adversaries to take out Wong Lung, ranging from a big fat chick to her own Bronzemen to a gang of midgets. Yes, a gang of midgets. Of course, Wong Lung is so refined in his martial arts techniques that he defeats them all. Naturally, Miss Sophie enacts Plan B (kidnap Bruce's cousin; hey, at least it wasn't the same old girlfriend routine). But Bruce springs her easily with the help of Mia, one of Miss Sophie's sympathetic employees who actually holds the other half of the coin. Yeah, I didn't get it either. Anyway, the trio find the treasure buried at a race horse track but the box is empty. Miss Sophie is pissed, so she sends her midgets to kill Wong & co. They partially succeed by killing Bruce's cousin and Mia. Seems Wong was too busy fighting a hired assassin to protect them. Of course, seeing his only female friends dead really pisses him off, so Wong Lung heads to the baddies HQ to get revenge. The treasure is never mentioned again. The End.

Damn, you know for a movie with some many fights and stuff, it sure did suck. You would think that a film featuring such diverse elements as midgets, Bronzemen and hot women would rule, but it never really rises above anything but boring. Lensed in the Philippines, this film looks like it cost all of a \$1.37 to make. I mean this thing is cheap! The Bronzemen look like the exact same ones from Joseph Kong's earlier CLONES OF BRUCE LEE. He probably kept them in storage and just dusted them off for this one. If anything, there is one good fight scene towards the end between Bruce Le and Cheung Lik. Cheung Lik is a hired killer who pops up from time to time telling Bruce that they will have to fight soon. When that moment comes, it is pretty decent until the end of their fight. Bruce just says, "Our fighting technique is the same. There is no need to fight." Cheung Lik nods in agreement and the fight is over. What? You know you ain't gonna get paid if you don't finish the job, right?

The plot is beyond comprehension, but I think I figured it out. It seems I cared more about the treasure than the folks in the film. I mean, we never find out what it is! All of these people must be fighting for something. The dubbing on the film is incredibly strange as well. Bruce Le is dubbed by some Spanish guy, I kid you not! He ends up sounding like a drunk Antonio Banderas. I guess it is a nice change of pace from those stuffy British guys. Still, that is not enough to make this film enjoyable.

NOTE: Several sources list this film as being an alternate title for TREASURE OF BRUCE LE. It is not the same film.

**Bruce, King of Kung Fu (1980: Daniel Lau Tan-ching, Bruce Le)** - This was bad. Really bad. I did notice though this helps you to sleep late at night. What surprised me most was that I had actually seen this years ago and I have it on another DVD with the name *The Legend of Bruce Lee* from Goodtimes. It also has another release from Tai Seng called *The Young Bruce Lee*. I actually remember more about me purchasing that film than watching it (I bought another film on Amazon with the same title but received that one instead; I was not a winner in that transaction.)

I do wonder about the dub though. Seriously if you watch it (you really shouldn't) try imagining someone else's name used instead of Bruce. It actually works because you don't really think of this as a Bruce Lee biography. What is funny is that it actually takes a backward approach to Bruce's own realization with martial arts (though not as hilarious as stating that Bruce Lee was born in Seattle.) Here we have a character who brags about boxing, gets taught a lesson from Wing Chun, learns Wing Chun, gets taught a lesson from a blind man, later gets taught a lesson from a snake fist practitioner and well Bruce Le(e) gets beat up a lot in this film. Le's one-note facial performance does not help either. Neither does the episodic direction where it literally feels like one scene after another is

improvised and they joined together to have a film. There is certainly a lot of well-known character actors here like Sek Kin, Hon Gwok-choi, Fung Ging-man (I must be in every film), Bolo Yeung, Funk Hak-on etc... Most stick around for one scene and then disappear. Hon Gwok-choi (count how many films I die in since I'm a sidekick) pretty much disappears (most likely to work on something else) though it looks like he has a stunt double for his "dead" body.

The highlight of the film is Bruce Le's handling of cobras where he teaches himself drunken snake-fist. None of the fight scenes are that interesting though. It ranges from competent to "why am I watching this."

**Bruce, Kung Fu Girls (Taiwan, 1975: Shut Dik) – aka Five Pretty Young Ladies** - Of the many Bruceploitation movies that proliferated throughout the Seventies, this ranks among the most brazen. It doesn't even bother to cast a Bruce Lee look-alike, just shoves his name in the title! Nevertheless what lifts Bruce, Kung Fu Girls to the front rank is a stellar turn from one of the greatest kung fu stars of all time: Polly Shang Kwan. Her shiny leather boots and hot-pants ensemble doesn't hurt either.

Hong Kong is rocked by a series of robberies committed by the Invisible Thief. Money just flies away before his victims' astonished eyes. With the HKPD under close scrutiny from the international press, the Chief Superintendent is pressured by his boss to crack this bizarre case. Meanwhile, triad tough guys chase a handsome but weedy scientist into a women's only indoor pool. These wrongdoers get their asses kicked by five bikini-clad kung fu girls, whose feisty leader (Polly Shang Kwan) is immediately smitten with the science guy. Turns out Polly is the superintendent's niece. Fresh from San Francisco, she and her gal pals frequent the local fitness centre for young ladies and are all lethally skilled at kung fu.

Featuring a fabulously funky fuzz guitar soundtrack, Bruce, Kung Fu Girls - or Five Pretty Young Ladies as its known in Hong Kong - takes a while to get going. Though the girls are clearly capable, Polly's uncle is reluctant to let them in on the action. "You girls shouldn't act so tough, or else nobody will want to marry you", he chortles, earning the enmity of feminists everywhere. There are weird detours such as when all the girls make separate dates with the scientist, only to daydream about enacting violent revenge when he seemingly stands them up. A lengthy musical interlude where they go hiking across picturesque mountains seems to have strayed from a Bollywood movie. Polly even strums guitar for a campfire sing-along. The film seemingly exists in part to extol the virtues of clean-living. Our gang of happy-go-lucky heroines indulge in such healthy activities as camping, playing Frisbee in the park and of course, practicing kung fu.

Eventually, the girls don their matching studded leather fetish outfits to prove themselves by saving an old businessman, then trap the Invisible Thief while he's in the midst of stealing the priceless "moon rock" on loan from the Americans. Whereupon the thief is unmasked and poor Polly gets an unfortunate surprise. Not the audience though, since we've already seen her scientist boyfriend step inside his high-tech invisible machine. While the science fiction tinged plot is largely a throwback to Sixties spy movies, the tone is disarmingly feminine with an emphasis on comic book romance to match the floral fashions and pastel-shaded production design. How many action movies end with the heroines being tearfully bestowed with flower garlands?

The film was directed by Shut Dik whose other notable work includes the Bruce Lee biopic Dragon Story (1974) and the bizarrely titled The Guy!! The Guy!! (1974). His camerawork is fluid and inventive enough to make one lament the cropped Cinemascope frame available on most fuzzy bootleg prints. The film isn't free of those characteristic HK movie eccentricities. At one point Chiao Ping (Elsa Yeung Wai-San) breaks the fourth wall and blows a kiss at the audience. While the engaging, attractive cast acquit themselves well as a whole, Polly Shang Kwan's fiery spin-kicks are truly something to behold. No wires, no stunt doubles. Polly was legit.

**Bruce Le's Greatest Revenge (Hong Kong, 1978: To Man Bo) – aka Way of the Dragon 2** - Yep, it's another remake of Fist of Fury, this time with Bruce Le as Chen Zhen (or near enough abouts). However, possibly because he has the acting ability of a corpse being jolted with a car battery, he shares the limelight with Tang Yen-Tsan (AKA, sheesh, Bruce Tong) and a surprisingly subdued (for him, anyway) Hon Kwok-Choi. In a small supporting role, yet billed prominently in the title sequence, is Lee Yi-Min, essentially playing the James Tien character from Fist of Fury, this time with some awesome three-section staff routines.

I'm not sure of the actual production dates, but I wonder if this was shot concurrently with the Bruce Li film *Fist of Fury III*, as not only the locations look familiar, but much of the casts are shared, right down to a slumming Ku Feng as a "Japanese villain."

At first, and typically for the time, this film has too much kung foolery, not helped by the hugely irritating presence of cross-eyed To Siu-Ming, who can't even walk without making a nuisance of himself. However, the film does improve. Rather than beginning with the death of Ho Yuen-Chia (here played by Lau Hok-Nin), we get to spend some time with the character before he is killed fighting the villains (no spiked biscuits here!).

Although the fights won't change the world, they are decent and exciting. Besides Ku Feng, we have a Korean fighter (San Kuai), complete with huge conical hat and baggy white robes, a Mongolian fighter (Bolo) and Bill Lake, who isn't too bad with a fencing sword, but was obviously cast because he looks like Robert Baker, albeit a pre-Charles Atlas version.

And one area where this film improves hugely over *Fist of Fury*? The Ching Wu students can actually fight!

**Bruce Lee: A Dragon Story (Taiwan, 1974: Shut Dik) - aka Super Dragon; The Dragon Dies Hard** - This film seems to actually aspire to the depths of shitty film making, and in that sense, is a resounding success. Of all the many Bruce Lee rip-offs, this is probably the worst I've seen. It's made even worse by its attempt to be a true-life biopic, which may be even less accurate in its portrayal of the facts than the overblown but enjoyable Hollywood salute to the Dragon, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*.

Bruce Li doesn't look like Bruce Lee. He doesn't have the muscles Bruce had, and sure as hell doesn't have the talent. They could have cast former Monkee Mickey Dolenz as Bruce and had a more believable imitator on their hands.

The basic plot of this film revolves around Bruce's desire to leave Hollywood and his white woman behind, return to Hong Kong, get a nice Chinese girl, and settle down to a traditional Chinese life. Somehow, I don't think so. Betty Ting Pei is portrayed as a sweet and loving woman whom only wanted what was best for Bruce. And all this time we thought she was a sluttish gangster-groupie drug addict who only had a career because of her harpyish addiction to famous men. Oh well, to her credit, in many of the films she would later make, she got naked.

This film is filled with nail-biting boredom, horrible fights scenes, and factual inaccuracies so utterly absurd that the whole thing crosses over from purely tasteless, boring drivel and becomes an insult.

This film relishes everything that was sordid and seedy about Lee's life, making it the mirror opposite of the similarly named Hollywood version of Bruce's life. Someday, someone will tell his story accurately, and you'll have a moving, powerful portrait of a flawed but ultimately heroic human being.

Until then, we have utter garbage like this three-day old trash. Bruce Li is at his worst here. We know he can be a decent actor and martial artist when he tried, but this movie is just plain awful. If this was how Bruce Li paid tribute to "his master," then Lee's ghost must be out gunning for revenge.

That in itself would be an interesting movie. Bruce Lee's ghost comes back to beat the shit out of Bruce Li, Bruce Le, Brute Lee, and all the other lame-ass wannabes who cashed in on his name, life, and death. And maybe, if we're lucky, he'll beat the shit out of David Carradine as well ... just for good measure, of course.

**Bruce Lee Against Supermen (Hong Kong, 1975: Wu Chia-Chun)** - Deep into the Bruceploitation craze, Bruce Lee *Against Supermen* uses Bruce Li to play Cato, the Green Hornet's superior sidekick, to draw audiences into the theater. Everything about the movie is designed around the original Green Hornet show, from the opening credits to the chauffeur/mask outfit that Bruce Li first appears in. After some bank robbers throw some money from the window of a getaway car, Cato nabs a gweilo couple that happens to have the bag fall at their feet. After a quick stop at the police station, he beats up some thugs that for some reason stop and harass him and then heads home. There he meets up with the Green Hornet and learns that his girlfriend Alice and her famous scientist father, Dr. T, are entertaining offers from Arabs to buy plans to a process that allows food to be derived from petroleum by-products. Of course some low-lives have plans to kidnap Dr. T and use the plans for their own gain. After several kidnappings and subsequent rescues by Carter (Cato), he and his friend Hon Yu employ the help of Eve, a comely

government agent who Carter promptly beds. When Alice comes looking for him to help rescue Dr. T (again), Hon Yu immediately sells Carter out and leads her to him and the Eve in the sack. What a friend! Meanwhile the criminal mastermind behind the kidnappings has hired a mystical fighter named Superman (Lung Fei) and his bevy of disciples to get rid of Carter once and for all. It's an all-out battle to protect Dr. T and his oil-food formula!

It goes without saying, Bruce Lee Against Supermen is a bad movie. The plot is a mess, the sets are terrible, the acting wooden and the fights are only slightly above average. Bruce Li and Lung Fei bring it every time, but that can only get you so far. There are tons of gweilo actors running around either acting like jerks or getting in the way, as well as gratuitous nudity from Alice and Eve. Other than Lung Fei, the actors that are supposed to appear intimidating are simply not, and Bruce seems to dispatch them rather easily. But is the movie entertaining in a bad, Brucesploitation type of way? Yes, but only if you are in the mood and have nothing better to watch.

**Bruce Lee and I (Hong Kong, 1976: John Law Ma) - aka Bruce Lee - His Last Days, His Last Nights; I Love You, Bruce Lee** - With his role as Kato in the "Green Hornet" series and his riveting cameo in "Marlowe", Bruce Lee had already become a major celebrity in Hong Kong by the late 1960's. After his disappointment at not getting the lead role in the television series "Kung Fu" (what value would that series have today I wonder if Bruce had starred?), he returned to the place where he had been a child star nearly a decade before. Martial arts films (generally of the wuxia variety) were booming in Hong Kong at the time with the Shaw Brothers in particular being the prime driving force behind this. So it made sense for Bruce to approach this company to see what sort of deal he could work out, but the Shaw's were not willing to give Bruce the salary he wanted (a reported offer of \$2,000 per film) nor the opportunity to make the kind of films he wanted. So Bruce turned to the newly found upstart company Golden Harvest run by a Shaw deserter, Raymond Chow, and was able to get what he was looking for – the independence to make his own films. A case could be made that this was the first major cut in the hide of the Shaw Brothers that would lead eventually to their demise as a film company. The success of the four films that Bruce made for Golden Harvest established them as the major competitor to the Shaw's and by the early 80's they were the dominant film company in Hong Kong.

Two years after Bruce's death, the Shaw's attempted to get some modicum of revenge by releasing this squalid squirrely film that supposedly details the last days in his life. His sudden death has engendered numerous conspiracy theories from being killed by the triads or the Mafia to death by his over use of drugs – though the official cause of death was a brain edema. This film plays it both ways, but in general it paints a rather negative portrait of the superstar as an obsessive jealous lover with a hair trigger temper that edged him towards psychosis. Over the years this film has become somewhat infamous in its various forms (re-edited for foreign consumption with titles like "Bruce Lee: His Last Days, His Last Nights") for its sleazy content and the chutzpah of its female lead. In the end though perhaps most insulting to the memory of Bruce Lee is that the film just isn't very good on any level – it contains way too much dull weepy melodrama to be an enjoyable exploitation film and there is not enough Bruce for Bruce fans. Its one redeeming factor other than watching it for its sheer brazenness is a solid impersonation of Bruce by Danny Lee who has all of his character's ticks down perfectly and doesn't do a bad job in the action sequences either. If only the actress could have gotten her character down better!

Bruce of course died in the apartment of Betty Ting Pei and so Shaw had the brilliant PR idea to have this actress play herself in this film – not only does she play herself but the entire film is presented from her supposed point of view. Betty had been a moderately successful actress in the Shaw stable during the late 60's to the early 70's and had co-starring roles in films like "The Millionaire Chase", "Apartment for Ladies" and "Yellow Muffler". Her film reputation was a bit naughty but she never became a star during her Shaw days and by 1973 they had parted ways. She acted in a few other films including some with Golden Harvest ("Stoner", "Games Gamblers Play" and "Naughty, Naughty"), before she returned to Shaw for this foray. Why she would take on this role other than for money is a bit puzzling and perhaps it was only for money or to regain some fame. After Bruce's death, she was often vilified in the press and hated by legions of Bruce Lee fans for bringing shame on him and maybe she thought this was her opportunity to set the record straight, but she emerges from this film with no respectability as she is portrayed as little more than a high class escort and gambling addict and certainly the manner in which Bruce is portrayed did little to endear her to his fans. After her career was over though she did quite well for herself by marrying the wealthy film producer Charles Heung – and after their divorce she is rumored to have become a nun!

The film begins in true cheese fashion with Betty walking on the beach at sunset mourning Bruce with a choir of heavenly voices singing in the background and her telling him "I wish you could rest in peace". The film rapidly devolves into a salacious flashback of her and Bruce nude in bed (though her naked breasts are clearly being doubled), him toking furiously on pot and popping pills after which she showers to come out and find him dead. She calls Raymond Chow (a very good look-alike) and tells him the bad news and the house falls in on her. But that was

only the press version as it turns out. Hounded by the media, shunned by all and threatened by a gang of nunchuck wielding toughs, she finds solace with a sympathetic bartender and tells him her side of her life with Bruce Lee.

Poor little Betty – picked on by her schoolmates growing up and ignored by her parents she is easy prey for a lecherous producer who fills her little head with visions of stardom. When he tries to get her to double a nude scene for an actress (and uses pictures of her taken after being drugged), she runs away and leaves Taiwan for Hong Kong. There though she runs into this producer again and is only saved by a mystery man who appears from nowhere and kicks the crap out of her molesters and tosses money at her to get back on her feet. Her feet though is not where she apparently spends her time – on her back would be more apropos – soon she is swirling in a delirium of men and money but won't be taken seriously as an actress – “they only want me to do pornos” she proclaims sadly. A few years later she runs into her rescuer again – now a famous star named Bruce Lee and he is immediately taken by her but says he only wants to be friends as he has a wife. This tease goes on – will they or won't they – at one time it appears they will as they both indulge in frantic foreplay by bouncing on a mattress and tossing pillows at one another like a scene out of “Love American Style”, but again the act is not consummated.

Poor Bruce. He is as horny as an alley cat – working on films during the day (amusingly under the direction of Lo Wei who at one time is reading a book while directing and at another time listening to the radio – he also was an ex-Shaw Brother persona and they were no doubt taking a crack at him as well as Raymond Chow on occasion) and looking for comfort at night. One time a groupie gets into his apartment, but after getting naked he can't continue because . . . he can only think of Betty and his loins grow hungry. She meanwhile is making merry with older wealthy men and spending her hard earned loot in casinos and usually losing it. This torments Bruce who takes to drink and fights and is falling apart. Finally, he persuades Chow to give Betty the leading female role in his next film, “Game of Death” (apparently a true fact) and he goes to her apartment to give her the good news. He gets a headache and she gives him an aspirin. These final days of Bruce were also relayed in a couple other trashy films - “Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger” (1976) and “Bruce Lee: A Dragon Story” (1974).

**Bruce Lee Fights Back from the Grave (South Korea, 1977: Lee Doo-Yong)** - In 1977, Hong Kong, Korean, and Italian producers made this cheapo martial arts production to capitalize on the Bruce Lee genre simply known as “Bruceploitation”. What is insane here is the fact that “Bruce Lee” is not even involved in the film, except for a fake grave that is struck by lightning in the opening.

The star of the film is credited as “Bruce K.L. Lea”. It is unknown what the “K.L.” stands for, but the true identity of this Bruce-alike is none other than Taekwondo Grandmaster Jun Chong. Chong also serves as martial arts director and he stands out at showcasing his impressive TKD skills.

There is also the major rumor of the director Lee Doo-Yong. Some sources have said that the true identity of the director was Italian giallo filmmaker Umberto Lenzi. However, in 1988, the name Lee Doo-Yong appeared as a director on Jun Chong's 1988 action film *Silent Assassins*. So whether this name is a true “pseudonym” is unknown and remains to this day unknown.

The plot is pretty standard for a kung fu film. Chong plays Wong Han, a martial artist who goes to Los Angeles to find his old friend had committed suicide. Upon investigating his death, he finds an ally in a woman named Susan, played by Deborah Chaplin Dutch. He learns that his old friend had been approached by five fighters, including an early appearance from Sho Kosugi. Chong takes all five fighters on to learn the truth. However, is all as it truly seems?

The trailer for the film was described as Bruce Lee coming back from the dead after making a deal with the “Black Angel of Death”. The real film is exactly the opposite of what the trailer describes, yet a surprising yet predictable twist in the end makes this, aside from Chong's martial arts skills, the only reasons worth seeing this film in the first place.

**Bruce Lee, Superstar (Taiwan, 1976: Ling Ping)** - Aka Chinese Chieh Chuan Kung Fu; Young Bruce Lee; Legend of Bruce Lee - Bruce Li is Bruce Lee in a very spotty bio flick and from a production not too concerned about much of anything. Do some familiar-ish beats out of Bruce's life but don't linger on any key events really seems to be the agenda. At 83 minutes, it's the journey of Lee dedicating himself to martial arts, makes a name for himself in movies and dies. In between there's a challenge or two outside of and on set of productions and supporting his best friend

(Au Yeung-Chung) trying to develop as an actor as well. Bruce Li shines in the short bursts the action scenes offer up but overall Bruce Lee Superstar is straightfaced Bruceploitation not really caring or taking the time to make a full biographical picture. A fascination for the genre helps and the movie is thoroughly watchable despite its spotty ways. Featuring footage from The New Game Of Death. Also with Lung Fei, Wei Ping-Ao, Tse Ling-Ling and Tai Leung.

**Bruce Lee, the Invincible (Hong Kong, 1978: Law Kei)** - After disrespecting his fellow countrymen, Chang Lee Kung (Michael Chan Wai Man) promises his teacher (Bolo Yeung) that he'll start a new, positive life in Malaysia. However, word gets around that he has become even more sinister ever since his move. He's now the head of an organization that controls an illegal gambling den and operates a shady mining company. In addition, he seduces married women and orders his henchmen to terrorize and kidnap innocent people.

Upon hearing about Chang Lee Kung's antics, three badasses head to Malaysia to put a stop to the madness: Master Fok Yuen Gap (Chan Sing), Yu Fong (Ho Chung Tao) and Shu San (Cheung Lik) — I take that back, two badasses (Sorry, Cheung Lik).

"Bruce Lee The Invincible" has something for everyone:

You want an all-star cast? You get Michael Chan Wai Man ("Five Element Ninjas"), Bruce Li ("Do I really need to name a movie?"), Chan Sing ("New Fist of Fury"), Cheung Lik ("Enter Three Dragons"), Bolo Yeung ("Enter the Dragon"), Fung Hak On ("Young Master"), Mars ("Police Story") and even a brief cameo by Eric Tsang ("Infernal Affairs").

You like to see cute chicks get kidnapped, slapped around and sexually assaulted? It's here, compliments of Chan Wai Ying ("Vice Squad 633"), who spends the whole movie getting abused in every single way. As an added bonus, you get to see her run around in a white spandex-like outfit. At one point, she even gets pushed into water. Water + white = translucent, if you catch my drift.

You want to learn the secret of the Shaolin Disguise Technique? See the magic happen before your eyes as Chan Sing becomes Mars (well-known actor/stuntman) with the help of a nifty rubber mask. I find it funny they chose Mars, since his body is a lot smaller than Chan Sing's. I suppose that's part of the "technique."

You want to see ass-kicking apes? They never really explain the what the deal is with these fighting apes, but depending on how they're killed, their eyes either bulge out or their brains sorta become exposed.

You want to see non-stop kung fu? Surprisingly, the action choreography is tight. There seriously isn't a dull moment during the fight sequences. I'm not saying they're the best I've seen, but they're certainly good considering how kooky the rest of the movie is.

I know this is cliché to say, but "Bruce Lee The Invincible" is so bad, that it's very entertaining.

**Bruce Lee - True Story (Hong Kong, 1975: Ng See-Yuen)** — aka **Bruce Lee: The Man, The Myth** - Surprisingly straightfaced and ambitious bio of Bruce Lee covering his time in America leading to his death after having just achieved super stardom, Ng See-Yuen, now that we have his directing career seemingly completed, proves that he was not just after making mad cinema utilizing and exploiting the image of Bruce Lee (Tower Of Death). Bruce Lee - True Story is flimsy for sure and no true depth comes out of ticking the boxes of the essential beats within Lee's shortlived story (going to America, creating Jeet Kune Do, taking on challenges, rejected in America only to become a superstar in Hong Kong etc) but the ambition is admirable. Especially since Ng seemingly goes to the same locations The Big Boss and Way Of The Dragon was shot (Thailand and Rome respectively). Not somber or dramatic as such though as direction (and dubbing) of in particular Westerners is highly awkward (and amusing) and Bruce's training facilities essentially turning into a science lab in his quest to improve his martial arts is memorable, goofy celluloid. Bruce Li is fine in the role and never misses a beat in the action department, one of the areas the film truly excels in. As a bonus after the main body of the film, Ng See-Yuen shoots scenes detailing the alternate rumours of Lee's death and even the theory that Lee disappeared to live as a recluse is touched upon. Not truly good or appropriate, this is still far from Bruceploitation, close to a drama but ultimately viewers will take away the goofy side of it in addition to the masterclass in action. Unicorn Chan, Chiu Chi-Ling, Fung Ging-Man, Mars and Lee Hoi-Sang also appear.



**Bruce Lee, We Miss You (Taiwan, 1976: Li Kuan-Chang) – aka Dragon Dies Hard** - In the tradition of Bruce Lee Fights Back from the Grave, The Clones of Bruce Lee, and Bruce Lee Vs. Street Fighter Vs. The X-Men Vs. Party of Five, Bruce Lee, We Miss You is just another poor attempt to exploit the legend's name, and milk it for every possible dollar it's worth.

That night, Stone is visited by the spirit of Bruce Lee (well, it was really just Bruce Li in another outfit - but I guess it served its purpose). If friends don't let friends drink and practice Death Touch, his vision, Stone confronts Lee, demanding to hear the details of his early demise. Lee only raises his hand, sending Stone reeling back to bed, and thus awakening him from his slumber. Though the conversation seemed rather vague and ambiguous (at least to me), Stone realizes that Lee wants him to investigate his murder, and uncover the truth. The next morning, Stone relays his intentions to Pao, and explains that because Lee's "death was violent, his spirit cannot rest." You know, Stone must really be proficient when it comes to reading between the lines, because I'm sure all Lee did was raise his hand.

Before setting out on his quest, Stone goes to the local abbot for some guidance. The sage informs Stone that in order to unravel the mystery, he must first prove himself as a kung-fu expert. Deductive reasoning, a keen observational eye, contacts on the streets - screw all that stuff! In order to be a good detective, you best be practicing your Drunken Hippo Fist! After testing Stone's kung-fu prowess, the abbot then decides to test his spirit, and sends Stone into the temple to meditate. During meditation, Stone is once again visited by Lee's ghost. This time, he envisions the actual altercation in which Lee is murdered.

Upon leaving the temple, Stone decides to begin the actual investigation, and the first step would be to question some of Lee's old acquaintances. So, Stone learns from some random guy on the street that Betty Tin, Lee's former friend and confidante, hangs out at the Dragon Nightclub on a daily basis. Stone goes to the club, and after saving Betty from the advances of a group of drunken thugs, she takes him home with her. Again, suave one-liners, a cool demeanor, stylin' clothes - it's all a bunch of malarkey; if you want to pick up girls, you best be practicing your Drunken Hippo Fist! At the house, Betty fixes Stone a drink, Is it Bruce, or is it Memorex? then excuses herself to slip into something a little more comfortable. Immediately upon her exit, Stone shuts off the lights, and makes like he's going to ransack the place for clues - but instead, he merely takes his drink to the window, and watches the approaching storm (?). Betty then returns in a slinky, thong negligee (Ok, it was only a modest nightgown), and is shocked when Stone is illuminated by the lightning outside and she mistakes him for Lee. After being consoled, Betty is called by Hao Tao (Her friend? Boss?), who, after being told of her visitor and his remarkable likeness to Bruce, tells her to get rid of Stone immediately, for he may be trouble. So Betty, politely, walks Stone to the door, and they bid each other adieu. Walking home, Stone deftly eludes a tail sent by Tao, thus confirming he must be on the right trail. Tao, now realizing that he has underestimated this Bruce Lee look-alike, decides to resort to more subtle tactics to discover Stone's intentions - and enlists Betty as an unwilling accomplice.

After Stone ignores his various threats to keep out of Lee's affairs, Tao takes it to the next level and kidnaps Pao. After being confronted by Stone, Betty breaks Today on Fashion from Strange Lands: The Pine Cone Corsage down and tells him where they are keeping Pao captive. Immediately, Stone runs to the hideout and springs his brother. Now realizing that he is putting not only himself, but also his family in danger, Stone decides to seek refuge at the temple for a while, and lay low until the heat blows over.

After a mere two weeks, the hiatus from his investigation has made Stone restless, so one night, he dresses like Bruce Lee, and runs around town scaring various members of Tao's gang into thinking Bruce is still alive. To what purpose this serves, I have absolutely no idea. Finally, though his methods are questionable, Stone actually discovers the identity of those who murdered Lee. It appears that the Bad Guys were trying to coerce Bruce into a fixed fight for the European title (?), and when Bruce refused to participate in these underhanded undertakings, they simply took him out. Stone, empowered with the truth and a burning desire for justice, sets out to punish the wicked for the crimes, thus allowing Lee's spirit to rest, and restoring the legacy of Cynthia Rothrock....er, I mean Bruce Lee.

First, the good stuff - Bruce Lee, We Miss You has something going for it that many films of the "chop-socky" genre do not - a story that's actually coherent. Usually, kung-fu movies focus more on the martial arts, and little (sometimes "Of course I'm a bad guy, observe my total disregard for dental hygiene!" none) on the story. This, in some aspects, is how it should be - but when the story is completely nonsensical, as is often the case, then it makes the great kung-fu kinda pointless. The story in Bruce Lee, We Miss You is logical, and quite easy to follow. Not once did I have to start taking notes like, "Fung was dishonored by Lei, whose teacher was killed by Jei-Poo, who, come to find out, is actually Fung's sister's brother-in-law (twice removed)."

Unfortunately, a coherent story is about all this film has going for it. I don't know what specific brand of crack the editor was on when he cut this movie, but by the looks of things, he got his money's worth. During a majority of the fight scenes, I noticed several pieces that seemed to be missing - a punch, a kick - you really couldn't tell. You would see men falling, but were never made privy to the cause of the fall. I remember one scene in particular where I saw the same thing twice consecutively. How do you overlook something like that?

Finally, the fighting sucked. There's no better way of putting it. The first, and most important (and I thought most obvious) rule of making a chop-socky flick is to have interesting fights. A coherent story is just dandy, but without some quality kung-fu action, you're missing the entire crux of the martial arts film. The target audience of the genre will put up with just about anything - guys who can jump into trees, ninjas whose weapon repertoire consists of vomit - but if you don't have some good fighting, then you don't have a successful kung-fu film. I don't know if it was the choreography, or the skill of the participants (to be honest, I've never been impressed by Bruce Li), but I constantly found myself fast-forwarding through the fight scenes. And when watching a movie which revolves around fighting - that proves to be quite a problem.

----

These are the times of which to cherish...

During his meditation at the temple, Stone envisions Bruce Lee practicing Kata over some candles. For some reason, I just couldn't get The Police's "Wrapped Around Your Finger" out of my head.

- Bruce Li's shameless mimicking of Bruce Lee's trademark fight noises - the howls, the yelps, the squealing, etc. It sounded kind of silly when Lee himself did it, but it was one of his trademarks. With Li, on the other hand, it just sounds silly.

Whenever Stone recalls a message from one of his ghostly visits from Lee, it shows Bruce superimposed over Stone's brain. Because, in case you're an idiot, he's thinking about it.

- During a walk in the park, Stone attempts to entice Betty into learning some martial arts, to which Betty replies, "I'm a girl, it's no use." Then, after thoroughly disgusting feminists everywhere, the conversation turns to Betty's love life, where she divulges that she has never known the intimate touch of a man. The funny thing is, in the context of the film, it's played like that's a noble virtue of being a hero. Listen, if (involuntary) abstinence is the stuff of legend, then you can consider me your hero.

After springing Pao from the Bad Guys' hideout, Stone ends up taking on some evil doers atop a moving bus. Again, though this could have provided for some quality tail-kickin', it just falls short of exciting. Especially since the bus appears to be going about 10 MPH. (This scene also includes the requisite ride over a bridge, bad guy gets thrown into the water.)

During a flashback, Betty recalls the night Bruce died. Apparently, he showed up at her apartment, took off his shirt (exposing a mild bruise?), and then proceeded to thrash about on the bed for about ten minutes (in slow motion). If the filmmakers were really trying to honor Lee's memory, making him look a like an idiot (not to mention a wuss) was probably not a good idea.

**Bruce Lee In New Guinea (Hong Kong, 1978: Yang Chi-Yao) – aka Snake Island** - In this, Ho Chung Dao gets on a trip to the southern Pacific and ends on an island that's been taken over by a snake-worshipping cult (led by Chan Sing). When our hero gets injured in a fight with the cult leader (who uses a sort of brace nuckles with venomous fangs), a priestess (Dana) and her servants restore him back to health so he can go and rid the tribe of the maniac.

It's more of an adventure film, though it has some nice action (Bruce and his sidekick fighting the tribe, the scenes with Chan Sing) and gratuitous nudity that made this a Category 3, though there's nothing too explicit (hkcinemagic blocked the picture gallery, I assume because a screenshot in there shows Dana's breasts) - a bunch of chicks whose outfits become transparent when they get in water while playing around at the beach (though you don't see much on the release I watched since it's of rather bad quality and pretty dark) or Dana's peculiar way of keeping Ho Chung Dao warm (she removes the little she has on, slips in the bed and lies on him). There's also a gorilla who protects the chicks, but he only fights a pair of tribe dudes trying to get their way with some of the chicks (the scene is hilarious though).

Bolo is completely wasted here - no, I'm not talking of heavy drinking. His only scene consists in throwing some shapes and running away. He fights Ho Chung Dao, so they merely show off, Bolo jumps around a bit and that's it - a shame really since Bolo's action here looks swift and very nicely done.

Frankly, I remembered he had a little appearance in this, but this is even more disappointing than I thought. Watch this for Ho Chung Dao (cause he's pretty good in this one - and he has a sex scene, which I don't think happened a lot in Bruceploitation), Dana fully nude (seriously, she's really hot), Chan Sing's great action (his Snake Fist is really swift, fast and threatening) or just for its colorful setting - hell, even because it has a gorilla in it - but not for Bolo cause it's really not worth the trouble.

**Bruce Strikes Back (Hong Kong, 1982: Joseph Kong, Bruce Le) - Aka Ninja Strikes Back; Eye of the Dragon** - I'm curious as to how Bruceploitation front-man Bruce Le (aka Huang Kin-Lung, a Burmese-born Chinese) hooked up with Euro-exploitation producer Dick Randall. Randall is the same guy who unleashed the violent and sleazy slasher movie *Pieces* onto an unsuspecting public, even having the moxie to compare it to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. He also gave us the Christmas-themed slasher *Don't Open til Christmas*, one of the more vicious entries in the genre. Together, Le and Randall gave us some of the sleaziest, most salacious martial arts movies ever filmed. *Bruce Strikes Back* appears to be the last example of this match made in...er...somewhere.

After a pointless opening establishing Bruce Le's (who plays a guy named "Bruce") fighting credentials by beating up a bunch of thugs in a gambling den, we learn that he's a small-time criminal working for some white guy in Italy, who spends the entire movie at the pool with no less than two topless girls around him at any given moment. He has an Italian girlfriend and his partner-in-crime is Wang Fei, played by Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee. During a deal-gone-wrong, Le takes a bullet and is unable to escape, getting brought in by the police instead. Upon his release, Le decides to go straight and leave his past behind him. Yeah, like that always works.

You see, his former boss is upset that the American ambassador won't work with him, and decides to kidnap his daughter to help persuade him. He wants Le involved with the job, while Le just wants to marry his girlfriend and spend their days going to nude beaches, rubbing suntan lotion on the backs of her and her busty friend. Can't say that I blame him. When Le turns down the job, boss man has Wang Fei kick the stuffing out of Le, putting him in the hospital. He's visited by two cops (Andre Koob and Corliss Randall, whose stage name is "Chick Norris"), who ask him to help them find the those responsible for Sophie's (the ambassador's daughter) kidnapping.

Bruce and Andre go to Paris, where they visit porn shoots and whatnot looking for suspects. They also beat people up and try to drown people in urinals in order to get people to spill the beans. In the end, they find out the Sophie has been taken to Macao, where's she's being held captive by a gang of ninja, led by Oddjob himself, Harold Sakata (complete with steel-brimmed bowler hat). Bruce initially tells Andre that it's the end of the line for him, but a sniper at a nude beach changes Bruce's fate and makes him determined to bring down his former boss's entire operation.

I'm pretty sure that outside of the fighting, people are going to most notice how much female skin is on display here. I counted at least eleven breasts on display from six actresses (the two girls at the pool, Bruce's girlfriend and her friend, Sophie—who spends most of her captivity topless, and some random girl who's making out with a suspect in Paris), plus a few bare rears. Now, about that random girl in mentioned in parentheses: from the position of her on the bed and the placement of the camera, I can only surmise that French women circa 1982 had very different standards for intimate hygiene than we in the Western Hemisphere have, or she was wearing the Merkin to End All Merkins. Speaking of merkins, who thought it a good idea to glue one to the small of Bolo Yeung's back to make him look intimidating? The only kung fu movie I've seen so far that's sleazier than this film is *Tatoo Connection*, which almost makes me want to take a shower even thinking about it. At least *Bruce Strikes Back* doesn't have the nominal hero berating his girlfriend for getting raped, as if it were her fault she couldn't beat Chen Sing in a fight.

Speaking of beating people in a fight, let's talk about the action. First and foremost, let me discuss Bruce Le. Mr. Huang Kin Lung is not a bootmaster, although I kind of think he could've been one had he aspired to such title...and were a better action director to boot. His specialty is hung gar and Bruce Lee imitating, on which he holds his own. But his action direction is very same-y and can get old after a few fights. I mean, Bruce Lee fights are infinitely more rewatchable than Le's, and I was wondering why (especially as I watched *Way of the Dragon* this week as well). I think there are two factors at play. The first is the camera work. While the films of his I've seen are devoid of shaky cam, quick cuts, and other things that can ruin a fight, the camera is often placed in a way that you can't see the entire move being performed. It's far enough from the performers that you can see everything, but it might be positioned so that it's filming the kicker from behind, so you don't see enough of the kick itself to appreciate it. The other problem is that his moves are performed too fast. I remember a Donnie Yen interview where he talked about

his experience on *Drunken Tai Chi*, learning that when Yuen Woo-Ping told him to move faster, it wasn't real world faster, but on-camera faster, where you adjust the speed so the move doesn't look like a blur, but still comes across as fast. Too many of Le's moves are performed at real world speed, instead of on-camera speed, and it makes the fights less interesting.

And what about the kicking? Well, we have two superkickers in the cast. Casanova Wong has a cameo as Le's brother during the Macao sequence, and gets to fight some ninja during a couple of fight scenes. He also fights Bolo Yeung, whom he fends off with some multiple sidekicks, which have some major height, speed and look cool because he never lowers his leg as he does them. He doesn't quite go all tornado on his opponents, but he brings more vitality to his fights than Le does.

Even better is Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee, who plays the main opponent. He gets two short fights early on, plus a scene where he executes a stool pigeon by performing his patented triple no-shadow kick. In his first fight, he does a nice bit where he jumps on top of a car, slides across, and kicks a guy on the other side in the face. It's performed smoothly as if it were one long, skillful movement. Then we get the finale, where he faces off with Le in the Colosseum. Hwang gets the upper hand with his Eagle Claw, necessary to leave scratches all over Bruce Le like his counterpart in *Enter the Dragon*. Bruce Le then whips out the Bruce Le imitation skills, which allow him to get even out the odds. Hwang then goes buck with the kicks, and we get another exhibition of his no-shadow kick and the bit where he works Le's face back and forth with a combination of roundhouse/heel kicks without lowering his leg. The fight ends with the goofiest X-Ray vision committed to celluloid, which wouldn't feel out of place in that episode of Looney Tunes where Bugs Bunny fights that huge boxer.

In the end, the film should satisfy most fans of both Bruceploitation and Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee. Anyone who ever watched *Goldfinger* and wondered how Oddjob would fare against the Little Dragon should enjoy their brief skirmish as well. Exploitation fans will get a kick out of all the nudity on display. It's not art but...it's not art.

**Bruce Takes Dragon Town (Taiwan, 1974: Liu Hung-Sheng) – aka Dare You Touch Me** - The synopsis from the box (spelling errors and all):

"Bruce is forced into a swirling dilemma between 2 antagonistic drug smugglers. And although he is grittily double crossed he manages to emerge triumphant. See this kung fu speciality explode in a bloody spectacle of wrath, rage and vengeance as Bruce takes Dragon Town."

You know, it is one thing when gangs double cross you, but when they "grittily" double cross you, then you know it is time to kick ass! This Taiwanese production is typical of the Bruceploitation genre with the title being the only Bruce-y thing about it. The only thing it has in common with Bruce Lee films is that it features a lot of Asian folks. Hell, the lead character's name is Alan, not Bruce! I guess ALAN TAKES DRAGON TOWN just didn't have that ring to it.

Bruce Lie, as credited on the Ocean Shores box, is really Yuan Shih Ho and he stars as Alan Fung. Local crime boss Mr. Chen kidnaps Alan's mother and forces Alan to do his bidding. Actually, Alan's mom forces him. When Alan comes to save her and beats in the heads of some thugs, she chastises him saying, "When will you grow up and behave like a gentleman? Don't you know right from wrong yet?" Uh, you realized you were kidnapped, right lady? Anyway, Alan heads to a town (I guess this would be the Dragon Town of the title) to confront rival crime boss Mr. Wen for Mr. Chen. The whole town is shocked to see "Daredevil" Alan return, especially his ex-girlfriend (yeah baby!). Seems Alan split town a few years prior following the deaths of his two older brothers by the hand of local gangs (by mistake no less - they thought they were killing Alan). But now he is back to handle business, both professional and personal. To get the upper hand against Alan and Mr. Chen, Mr. Wen kidnaps Alan's mother (kidnapped twice in one week - damn!) but she dies in the process (smooth move pal). So Mr. Wen kidnaps Alan's best friend Eddie. However, Alan is hip to the scheme, saves Eddie and begins a plan to pit the two gangs against each other, YOJIMBO style!

While not a Bruceploitation title (outside of the misleading credits), this is a pretty decent martial arts flick. There are some good fights through out and some unintentionally funny scenes. At one point in the film some thugs with ropes attack Alan. They tie him up but he gets loose and jumps the rope in front of them. Way to intimidate them pal! Anyone familiar with Jimmy Wang Yu films will recognize many of the supporting cast members. Especially good is Lung Fei as Mr. Wen's main henchman. At the end, he and Alan duke it out all over a coal factory. The fight ends when Alan jumps off a 50-foot tower and lands on the Lung Fei's back. OUCH! Now I know why they call him "Daredevil" Alan. Alan then says, "I did it for mom" so I guess that makes it okay. THE END!

**Bruce the Superhero (Hong Kong, 1979: Bruce Le)** - Bruce Le, one of the famous Bruce-alikes, stars, produces, choreographs, and directs this pretty decent Hong Kong action film shot in the Philippines thanks to his supporting cast of veteran kung fu stars and Filipino actors.

Le plays Bruce Chang, a kung fu expert who has learned his sister is dead. Before she died, Susan was the keeper to a treasure map that was held in the hilt of a samurai sword. When members of the Double Lightning gang assaulted her, she got help from Filipino boxer Rocky Robeldo (Lito Lapid), but it was too late. However, Rocky did receive a key that was to be given to Bruce. When Interpol learns of the treasure and plans to protect it from the Double Lightning gang, they send Agent Platinum (Azenith Briones) to befriend Rocky. Meanwhile, the Double Lightning gang have allied themselves with the Black Dragon gang and two warriors, Peter Sze (Bolo Yeung) and Kong (Chiang Tao), the latter who has a grudge against Bruce. Together, Bruce, Rocky, and Agent Platinum must find the treasure and take on all who stand in their way to make sure it stays safe.

With a film title such as Bruce the Superhero, it is pretty much clear what you are intending to watch. It is also true that Bruce-alike Bruce Le has done some pretty trashy films. Unlike some of his more exploitative films, this is a routine modern day kung fu film with barely any gratuitous nudity to enhance the film. Instead, Le went from square one and released a ballsy action film revolving around a treasure map and together with a Filipino boxer, a kung fu master must avenge his sister's death and protect the treasure at the same time. Another reason why this stands out from some of Le's other fare is that he makes good use of the budget in terms of location. Shot in the Philippines, Le was able to cast local talent from there as his co-stars as well as two veteran kung fu stars. Bolo Yeung plays the "Bull-Killer" while Chiang Tao, a Shaw Brothers actor, plays a kung fu expert who holds a grudge against Le for a match that happened years ago.

Filipino boxer turned politician Lito Lapid plays Rocky, a young fighter who helps Bruce on his mission. At times, he has no idea what he has gotten himself into, but when needed, his lightning fists do the talking. Eye candy for the film comes in the form of Filipino beauty pageant winner Azenith Briones, who plays the oddly named "Agent Platinum". Going undercover as a reporter, she helps Rocky and Bruce but to be honest, she doesn't really help much. She plays more of a victim than anything and she wasn't really needed in the film as her part was only a second fiddle.

Le actually crafted some pretty interesting action sequences that makes this one of his best films. Not only does Le use his skills in kung fu, but he utilizes the martial arts skills of Chiang Tao and Bolo Yeung. Furthermore, rather than teach Lito Lapid how to kick, he has Lapid show off his impressive boxing skills by making him a lightning fisted fighter who takes on whoever stands in his way. Action wise, the only disappointment comes in the form of the showdown between Le and Yeung. It was a little too short and set up for a more longer battle between Le and Chiang, which has its ridiculous moments. However, as a Bruceploitation fan, the ridicule is what is expected.

Bruce the Superhero is definitely one of the better Bruce Le films made, thanks to the combination of adequate action and star power in both Hong Kong and the Philippines.

**Bruce Tuan - 7 Promises (Taiwan, 1980: Au Yeung Wang)** - Ku Long provided with Night Orchid he could pen a movie-script with the usual colour of a Wuxia pian but with scaled down characters and twists in favour of a comprehensible narrative. Perhaps there was one such present in Bruce Tuan - 7 Promises but under the guidance of Au-Yeung Wang, nothing stands out as coherent or compelling. The main weapon of desire, the Jade Sword, that can kill without touching an opponent is a cool but highly awkward looking idea (seeing as it looks more like a knife) but on the surface the movie seems to bring an above average design sense though. The action also keeps matters grounded with only select dips into more fantastical techniques. But the longer it runs, it looks more and more like actors casually saying the lines demanded of them to advance a script that in turns transforms into pure incoherency that is neither charming or fun. Said colors of the genre quickly fades throughout too and even action becomes increasingly flat. Just like the movie. A big parenthesis. Starring Mang Fei, Chen Sing and Yueh Hua.

**Bruce Vs. Bill (Hong Kong, 1981: Lam Kwok-Cheung)** - The Bruce Lee imitators were old news by the time this film was made, which meant that director Lin Kuo-hsiang could focus on actually making a movie and not just an assemblage of motifs in which the fighting is almost incidental. Bruce Le is simply 'David', a taciturn figure who struts through the era of Sun Yat-sen in a polyester disco suit (with a talking parrot on his shoulder, believe it or not, and an ultimately treacherous girlfriend named Fanny). Initially, he and Wang Piao (Bill Louie, who co-starred with Jackie Chan's real-life sifu, Yu Chan-yuan, in "The Old Master") are at odds with one another, but finally they team up to foil a plot to steal funds from the Chinese Nationalists. When I say that "Bruce vs. Bill" is workmanlike, I mean

that the script and direction are tolerable, and that the fights are adequately choreographed. There's absolutely nothing exceptional about the action in this film, but that's strangely comforting for lifelong fans of chop-socky. You expect stolid heroes, big, mean-looking villains and numerous battles to the death, and that's what you get here. (Best fight: Bill Louie against the snarling, paunchy bald guy at the end of the movie. It gets downright brutal when they scuffle their way into what looks like a primitive water treatment facility.) Average by most standards, but above par for a Bruceploitation flick. Five and a half stars.

**Bruce's Deadly Fingers (Hong Kong, 1976: Joseph Kong) – aka Bruce's Fingers** – Bruce Le's first starring role in a Bruceploitation flick (I don't count *Big Boss Part 2*, since it was a limited role from what I can tell) is a watchable, but mediocre affair limited by the lack of talent behind the camera. Basically, Lo Lieh plays a criminal gangster who's looking for a martial arts manual written by Bruce Lee himself detailing the techniques of a special finger-based style (the dubbing has the characters referring to the manual as the "kung fu finger book" every. Single. Time.). He thinks it's in the hands of Bruce Lee's top student, Bruce Wong (played by Bruce Le), so he sends his men to kidnap the Family servant (the old guy from *Enter the Dragon*) and rough up his friends. Bruce Wong shows up in Hong Kong from the States and starts looking for it as well. Their paths do cross, although initially not because of the book, but because his sister's deadbeat boyfriend was trying to sell her into prostitution to pay off his own gambling debts (the scuzz bucket goes as far as to promise her that after two months of whoring, she can stop and they can get married). Bruce Wong eventually teams up with two of his own students (including Cheung Lik) and an Interpol agent (Michael Chan Wai-Man) to take down Lo Lieh.

I find it interesting that when Bruce Le's character does come into the possession of the book, the style depicted in it looks suspiciously like hung gar (Huang Kin-Lung studied hung gar, Bruce Lee did not). And yet, when Bruce Wong shows it off to his uncle, a wing chun master, the finger style looks like wing chun. My head is spinning. Bruce Le's fighting style looks like the Little Dragon's mannerisms with some hung gar thrown in for good measure. The problem is that Bruce Lee had the intensity and natural charisma to make jeet kune do's more basic moves look interesting. Huang Kin Lung/Bruce Le lacks the acting skill and innate charisma to overcome the sense of "sameness" that permeates his fights. Compare with Michael Chan's fights (he mixes a basher style with some ying jao pai, or Northern Eagle Claw), which are a lot more assured and intense, and ultimately more interesting. It also doesn't help that Bruce Wong is a jerk-off at times, like the time he hires a prostitute, asks her to keep her clothes on (it's a ploy to get her pimp's attention), but constantly talks harshly to her. Bruce Le resembles the real thing inasmuch as he keeps his Big Honkin' Sunglasses on, but not to so much with them off. And the guy's pink and yellow tank-tops are an eyesore.

The movie picks up during the last 20 minutes, when he, Michael Chan and Cheung Lik storm Lo Lieh's compound. Each man gets his chance to shine, fighting numerous knife-wielding henchmen, perennial movie heavies Bolo Yeung and Chiang Tao, and ultimately Lo Lieh. The final showdown between Bruce Le and Lo Lieh is a letdown, though. And the version I saw cuts off before the death blow is delivered. Boo sir. I say boo.

The movie also features some female exploitation that add nothing to the story, like when we see an unwilling prostitute (wearing absolutely nothing) be tortured both psychologically and physically by the guys dangling a little snake above her (I think they go so far as to rub it against her lady fields). There's another rape scene with Lo Lieh's men and some seemingly random women, set in a field where the bad guys have made a ring of fire with gasoline for reasons I don't quite understand yet. Rape and torture as the means for titillation is not a good idea, which I'm sure was on the filmmakers' minds when they made this.

So, if Bruce Lee was the Dragon and Bruce Li was the Tiger, what was Bruce Le? The leopard? The bobcat? The monitor lizard? If it were the former, then we could say that while Bruce Lee's meme was "Enter the Dragon"; and Bruce Li's meme was "Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger"; that Bruce Le's meme would be "You've entered both the Dragon and the Tiger, but if you have nothing better to do, why not see about entering the Leopard while you're at it?"

**Bruce's Fist of Vengeance (Phillipines, 1980: Bill James)** - Not to be confused with the similarly titled BRUCE'S FISTS OF VENGEANCE (how is that for confusing?), this Manila shot action flick features Bruce Le as a martial arts instructor. His good friend Jack Lee (played by a guy named Jack Lee) is one of Bruce Lee's final students who owns...get this...Bruce Lee's Finger Technique Book! Of course, as all martial arts film aficionados know, if someone has this book then chances are someone evil is close behind trying to get it. The evil here comes in the form of the not so intimidating Miguel (Romano Kristoff), a rival martial arts instructor who fancies himself a tough guy. Bruce soon finds himself in a heap of trouble after Jack lets him borrow the book and Miguel's men come looking for it. In order to get what they want, the men follow movie villain conduct rule # 86 and kidnap Bruce's girl. Wrong move because Bruce has been studying! Look out!

Damn it! This movie is weak. Like most Bruce Le flicks, it features a dawdling pace until the end. Hell, if it weren't for the last 20 minutes, the film would be a bust all together. The ending, with Bruce attacking Miguel's hideout all by himself, features a few nice bits as Le fights a number of different opponents. Up until that point, the only thing positive about this movie is that you can laugh at it. Who will forget the scene where Miguel jumps up and down after defeating Bruce at a tournament? Or when Jack schools an obnoxious student by ripping off his pants? Or when Miguel's men torture Jack by putting his legs behind his head? Instead of watching the movie for those scenes, just look at the pictures below. Believe me, you are saving yourself some time.

Fans will most likely want to stay away from the version of this film on the DRAGON 4-PACK from Video Asia. Not only is the picture quality poor, but there is a sound problem. Initially the sound is out of sync for about 1 second, but as the film progresses it becomes more and more out of sync, resulting in sound effects arriving a full 2 seconds after the action.

**Brutal Boxer, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Guan Shan)** - Also known as Blood Finger for its release abroad, The Brutal Boxer was sold on its carnage and that's no lie. You just have to wade through the standards that occasionally explodes into furious action first though. Concerning characters getting lured into the gangster world and taking on the big boss (Chen Sing, a fine choice if you want a brutal and bloody angle to shine through) eventually, The Brutal Boxer is short but doesn't warrant much attention for approximately an hour. Then laying it on thick with the need for bloody revenge, Raymond Lui heads this section and he is pissed. It's a finale slaughter that isn't the usual sights for these movies as it contains some unexpected make-up effects and a bloodthirsty aura that is welcome. Mars appears in an early supporting role and amidst the stuntmen a young Jackie Chan can be spotted.

**Brutal Sorcery (Hong Kong, 1983: Pang Ling)** - Some do it better than others (The Devil springs to mind) but the black magic genre brings the fireworks in a better way when we get a lead character who's truly an ass and deserves a bit of Thailand Black Death Magic. In this case, taxi driver Alan (Newton Lai) is haunted by the spirits of a couple not buried together so he does the nice thing by bringing their bones to Thailand to set things right. Then he cheats on his wife as he is on a holiday after all (when in Thailand...). Cue problems caused by his mistress in Thailand when he doesn't return.

In fact, we know by the opening moments Alan is dead so hoorah, let's wait and anticipate just how brutal sorcery can be. Passable but disappointing and same can be said for this entry in its particular horror genre. Much thanks to a low budget that can't produce many gruesome sights and I suspect the English dubbed Ocean Shores version I watched wasn't particularly intact either. Still the odd dip into contractual obligatory sights of maggots, maggots being vomited by the cursed, animated devils (who are the creations of our good natured Thai priest employed later in the film) are amusing and Fong Yau yet again playing an evil priest gets to pour maggots on himself and really chew scenery so despite there being little for US to chew on, it's an acceptable time provided by Pang Ling (Curse). Also with genre regular Kwan Hoi-San.

**Buddha Assassinator (Hong Kong, 1980: Richard Tung)** - aka Shogun Massacre - Just as *Drunken Master* was released following the success of *Snake in Eagle's Shadow*, *Buddha Assassinator* was released following the success of *Hell's Wind Staff*, which has already been reviewed here. These movies all follow what one book referred to as the "Seasonal formula," which I explained briefly in another review. Basically, the story involves some shmo who either knows martial arts and is arrogant about it or something, is humbled by an encounter with the main villain, and then has to learn a new style or improve his skills to beat the main guy. *Snake in Eagle's Shadow* started it (or at least popularized it) and then any other movie using the formula basically re-worked it with varying results.

Where *Hell's Wind Staff* was a reworking in a lot of ways of *Drunken Master*, this movie goes in reverse and in a lot of ways is more of a direct remake of *Snake in Eagle's Shadow*. The problem is that it commits a few of the same mistakes that it's inspiration made, makes some of its own, and unfortunately, is like the sixth or seventh movie that I've seen with this plotline, so now it's getting pretty old.

The movie begins with narrated explanation of the conflict between two specific styles: the Buddha fist and the Lo Han (not to be confused with Lindsey Lohan) fist. The Lo Han stylists are an arrogant lot and basically want power and prestige, therefore turning to the Chings/Manchus for just that. We're treated to a credits-sequence duel between two of the rivals before the story itself actually begins.

We begin with some guy going around in the dark stabbing a few Ching soldiers. He makes it to an inn where the innkeeper lets him into a special room. There we find (what else?) some Ming patriots plotting the assassination of a Ching prince who's due to visit the local temple.

We soon meet our protagonist, Shao Hai (Mang Hoi), a layman who does cleaning chores for the monks at the aforementioned temple (does this remind you of any certain movie?). Well, he's a pretty picked-on little guy and the monks seem to derive a lot of pleasure from pestering the poor sap. I must say, I've seen a few mean monks in kung fu films, but I've never seen so many jerk monks in one movie. This lot, in spite of following Buddha and learning kung fu in order to help others, are a bunch of pricks I tell you.

Well, eventually the Prince (Hwang Jang Lee) arrives to present his newborn son and pay his respects to Buddha. During this time, the Mings have placed a few assassins in various places, ready to kill at the right moment. Unfortunately, Shao Hai, being unaware of the plot, reveals that one of the monks has a knife and soon the plot is foiled and the assassins flee. Shao Hai is rewarded by the grateful Prince and is given a blank check on what he can do.

So Shao Hai, with his new power, basically goes back to the Temple and starts acting like a jerk in much the same way they were a jerk to him. After a while, the monks say "forget you!" and start beating him up. The Prince gets mad at Shao Hai's military escort for letting him get beat up and soon the escort is plotting Shao Hai's demise.

Meanwhile, those Ming patriots are at it again, plotting another assassination and killing traitors and stuff.

After almost getting beaten to death in a gambling den, Shao Hai, at his uncle's request, starts learning kung fu from the Prince, who's a proponent of the Lo Han style. He learns quickly, even though his uncle, a scruffy, dog-eating monk, is still able to whoop him in a fight. Shao Hai soon progresses to a point in which he's truly able to fend for himself, and ends up killing some intended assassins with the Lo Han fist. Unfortunately, one of the assassins is Shao Hai's sister.

Let's see: Ming patriots, Ching prince, sister who gets killed...you can imagine in which direction the story is going, right? I mean all of it is practically screaming, "overthrow the corrupt Chings and restore the Mings," isn't it? Doesn't it seem like a great recipe for a revenge story? Well, you're wrong.

The story actually goes back to ripping off *Snake in Eagle's Shadow* as the Prince finds out that Shao Hai's uncle is proponent of the Buddha fist and much like the other movie, the Lo Han stylists are completely dedicated to wiping out all of the practitioners of the Buddha fist. Soon enough, Shao Hai is learning the Buddha fist in order to use to save himself and his uncle from the Prince and his men.

Well, anyone who watches this movie will readily see the similarities between it and *Snake in Eagle's Shadow*. Heck, the movies are so similar that Hwang Jang Lee practically looks the same that he did in the other movie. Setting aside the whole Ming rebel subplot, the storylines are basically identical. Actually, that subplot is pretty superfluous, since it really doesn't do anything for the story in the last third of the movie. Why bother then? The movie basically jumps from one clichéd storyline to another without adding anything new to either one.

Two other downfalls to the movie is the humor and characters. The movie isn't all that funny, nor does it have any of the great dubbed dialogue that made *Drunken Master* and others so classic. The other major fault are the characters, who are rip-offs of their inspirations but lack the charisma that their predecessors had. Mang Hoi is a talented martial artist, but his character lacks the charisma and good-natured side which made Jackie Chan's Chin Fu so likeable and sympathetic. Shao Hai's uncle is a cheap version of Simon Yuen's Pai Chang-tian, once again lacking in his predecessor's charisma.

Well, in spite of all those flaws, the movie does have the action going for it. Like it's inspiration, there isn't a lot of action in the first half of *Buddha Assassinator*, but the film picks up in the second half when Shao Hai begins his training. The last 15 minutes or so is pure fighting, as Shao Hai gets to fight some soldiers, the Prince's two commanding officers, and then the Prince himself. The last battle goes for some eight minutes or so with Shao Hai using the five substyles of the Buddha Fist and the Prince using the three substyles of the Lo Han Fist, which is all pretty cool.

The choreography is furnished by Corey Yuen, who had participated in choreography of *Hell's Wind Staff*. He does a great job here, in both creating fictional styles and then realistically choreographing them. Once again, he gets the best out of Mang Hoi like he did in the previous movie. Mang Hoi is very acrobatic and performs to about the same calibre as Jackie Chan did back in those days. This is more proof that when Corey Yuen isn't using special FX, his work is among the best of the best.



Hwang Jang Lee basically replays the same character that he played before, but is less overtly evil than he was in the other movie. He's actually not THAT evil, until he finds out that Mang Hoi's uncle knows Buddha Fist and then he gets mean and violent. Hwang's fighting is excellent as usual and here we see a pretty good showcase for his kicking ability. He doesn't do a lot of fancy jump kicks, but we can see that the man could use his legs with more flexibility than normal people can use their arms. His Lo Han style is also pretty interesting, as it has three substyles: Mad Lo Han, Sleeping Lo Han, and Laughing Lo Han. It sounds similar to the "Emotional Kung Fu" that I'm told Jackie uses in *The Fearless Hyena*, though I haven't seen that movie.

The bottom line is this: fans of old school kung fu, Hwang Jang Lee, or of *Drunken Master* should enjoy *Buddha Assassinator*. It's an inferior reworking of a much-used formula, but the fight scenes are top notch. It's just that there's a lot to wade through to get to them. However, if you want to see someone using the Lotus position to kill two people simultaneously, well, this may be the move you've been looking for.

**Buddha's Palm (Hong Kong, 1982: Taylor Wong)** - Not the kind of nonsense you would normally associate Derek Yee with in this Taylor Wong directed Wuxia at Shaw's. Thankfully, it's very endearing nonsense in the tradition of Zu: Warriors From The Magic Mountain, but probably about 10 times more insane and creative. The lighting fast pace makes you quickly throw out any notions of analyzing the plot (and it's Wuxia fantasy anyway so it's not supposed to be grounded in any reality) and you just have to be swept away really when Wong showcases the high standard physical production values at Shaw's in combination with the crude, yet so thoroughly entertaining, animated special effects. Also starring Lo Lieh (who's character announces his presence well in advance for all other characters to take note. A scene stealing performance), Kara Hui, Alex Man, Shek Kin and Dameng, a rather compelling reject from Jim Henson's Creature Shop.

**Buddhist Fist (Hong Kong, 1980: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - "The Buddhist Fist" has a number of good points on which to recommend it, every one of them a nicely choreographed fight scene. It was blessed with a plot (of sorts), but if you want to watch some impressive old school then this is a keeper.

A number of "item fu" fight scenes are scattered throughout the movie. For those of you unfamiliar with the term, this is when the combatants are either using an unusual item as a weapon (like a chessboard) or fighting around the item (like a birdcage). When done correctly it almost seems like a dance, the two warriors trading the item as they exchange blows. They pulled it off marvelously here, though the songbird looked a little perplexed and wiggled out after his cage was tossed around.

We are first introduced to Au Chang and Siu Ming during their childhood. Even at such a young age it is obvious the young monk has a bad streak; he steals a potato and hands it off to Au Chang! This prompts a small horde of other children, evidently sons and daughters of the potato farmer, to pummel the thieves.

Years later the pair are well trained in their kung fu, but Au Chang is departing for the city to earn his fortune as a barber. Monks need a positive peer role model, so Siu Ming is soon framed for murder by a mysterious villain. Before modern police techniques were invented being framed for murder was surprisingly easy. A woman coerces the monk into drinking himself unconscious and then Chen Yang strangles her, leaving the body there with Siu Ming.

Meanwhile, the budding barber has his own troubles, namely a botched shaving job. Through a minor misunderstanding Au Chang shaves half the mustache from a violent customer and the resulting fight destroys the shop. Owners frown on you beating up the customers and damaging their property, so the unemployed barbers journey to Au Chang's village.

Things are looking bad on the home front; a masked fighter tried to steal the temple's jade Buddha statuette and Godfather has disappeared. It quickly becomes obvious that dark forces are at work. Strangers are trying to kill Au Chang! Assassins are hired to do him in and someone even puts a cute little green snake in his pocket. I think the snake was supposed to be poisonous, but maybe he had a snake phobia and they knew about it.

People in China must be constantly on the alert, because evidently a friendly greeting involves attacking someone to test their kung fu. Time after time when the childhood companions see each other they launch into a whirlwind of kicks and punches. Next time you see an old pal try taking a swing at him, show how cultured you have become.

The bad guys are exposed and a climactic battle takes place between the two friends, with the monk pulling a potentially fatal punch in the end and letting Au Chang kill him. As noted, it is just an excuse to set up different fight scenes. I love seeing them choose different styles and, of course, announce which one. "Drunken Buddha"

countered by "Furious Buddha" and so forth. With all the kung fu he invented you get to wondering when Buddha had time to start a religion.

**Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws (South Korea, 1981: Lee Hyeok-Su) - aka Half Piece of Map** - Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws is about as perfect an example of Godfrey Ho tampering that you're likely to come across. A 1981 Korean production titled *Yong-ho's Cousins*, directed by Lee Hyeok-su, it became one of the many Korean kung fu flicks that were picked up by Ho and Tomas Tang for overseas distribution through their Asso Asia company. At best, under Ho and Tang these movies would be given an English title, an English dub, and a new set of opening credits citing Ho (or one of his many aliases) as the director. At worse, they'd be given all of the above, and then also be re-edited into completely different plots than the original movie, or even have newly shot ninja footage inserted into the runtime to be passed off as a completely new movie.

In this case, Ho's meddling has it sat somewhere in the middle. While there's no new ninja footage randomly inserted, the original version *Yong-ho's Cousin's* has been completely chopped up and dubbed to resemble a very different beast than it started out as. The original involved a pair of Korean independence fighters that steal a horde of Japanese gold. When the pair meet an untimely end, half of a map which shows where the gold is buried ends up in the hands of one of the fighter's sisters, while the other ends up in the possession of Hwang Jang Lee. Step in Han Yong-cheol, who also plays an independence fighter looking for his fallen comrade's sister, and who ultimately gets embroiled in the search for the gold. Then you have Ho's version, which strips the plot down to make Hwang a mischievous card sharp who's after the gold, and ends up partnered with Yong-cheol to find it. That's pretty much it.

It isn't the first time one of Hyeok-su's movies has been bastardized by Ho's confusion inducing editing, with another production featuring Hwang Jang Lee from the same year, *Chunyang-ran*, being given the same treatment and released under the title of *Hard Bastard*. What's most interesting about *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws* though, at least in terms of its western marketing (which is exactly the audience it was edited for), is its heavy leaning on the presence of Hwang. In fact, the Silver Fox himself is not the main star of the piece, but rather he plays a supporting role to Han Yeong-cheol (who takes center stage on the original poster). Yong-cheol was the leading action star when it came to Korean kung fu flicks in the 70's, and even over 40 years since he first appeared onscreen in 1974's *Manchurian Tiger*, it's easy to see why. Six foot tall, handsome, and with a confident swagger, even dubbed into English his screen presence and charisma still shines through.

In many ways, the pairing of Yong-cheol alongside Hwang in *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws* can be seen as a handing over of the torch from one kicking legend to the other. By 1981 Hwang had already become a seemingly permanent fixture in Hong Kong movies as an indestructible villain, with enough classics to his name that they run into double figures. For Yong-cheol on the other hand, this would be the last movie he appeared in, and unlike his Korean contemporaries such as Casanova Wong and Kwan Yung-moon, he never felt the urge to hop over to Hong Kong and apply his formidable kicks there. Just 7 years earlier, Yong-cheol played the lead in one of his best movies, *Returned Single-Legged Man*, horrendously chopped up and released in the U.S. as *The Korean Connection*. While Yong-cheol played the title character, here Hwang was a nameless lackey, so for him to rise to co-star status by the time of *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws* is to be admired.

Interestingly Hyeok-su, who would continue making action movies all the way up to his final picture with 2002's *Quick Man*, cast Hwang in similar roles both in *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws* and *Hard Bastard*. Playing distinctly against type compared to the unstoppable villain roles he'd become accustomed to playing overseas, in both productions he plays comically inclined swindler type characters, who tend to run away from confrontation just as much as they're likely to get involved in it. Fans of the king of leg-fighters may be thrown off by such portrayals, and indeed 1981 itself is a unique year in the boot masters filmography. Apart from his comedic turns in Hyeok-su's productions, he'd spend part of the year minus his trademark beard (including here), and also make his directorial debut with *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha*.

One thing that can't be denied though, is the entertainment value derived from watching Yong-cheol and Hwang strut around in their fantastically 70's style wardrobe, despite it already being 1981. Bell bottom pants, oversized collar disco shirts, and blazers that look 2 sizes too big are the order of the day, and the visual appeal of throwing flying kicks in such attire can likely be appreciated more now than it could at the time of its release. While Yong-cheol had made his fair share of contemporary set movies, including *Strike of the Thunderkick Tiger* from the same year, Hwang on the other hand had mostly been cast in period pieces, and very rarely got to let loose in a modern day surrounding. This would change as the decade progressed, with appearances in the likes of *Bruce Strikes Back* and *Where's Officer Tuba?*, but by then the bell bottoms were out, and 80's style nylon tracksuits just didn't have the same appeal.

Hyeok-su had spent most of the 70's directing Korean kung fu movies, working with the likes of Casanova Wong, Dragon Lee, and Eagle Han, and sure enough for fans of the genre there are plenty of familiar faces to enjoy in *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws*. From Kwon Il-soo as a black leather blazer wearing assassin, to Kim Ki-ju as a cane

wielding villain. The main villain of the piece though comes in the form of Nam Chung-il, who never once takes his sunglasses off, even when he's in the middle of throwing down. The finale, which appears to take place in a gravel pit, has Yong-cheol taking on Ki-ju, before both Hwang and Chung-il show up, which sees it segue into a two versus one showdown against the latter. I admit that even for me it was strange to see Hwang paired up with another hero to take out the bad guy, as so many of the movies he appeared in involve 2 or more protagonists needing to team up to take out his usual villain character.

However it should come as no spoiler to say that, true to form, events culminate in the righteous Yong-cheol having to throw down against a backstabbing Hwang. To see two legends of the Korean kung-fu movie face off against each other is one of the main reasons to watch *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws*, and it should come as no surprise to say that the confrontation is suitably scrappy and raw. Those looking for Hong Kong style choreography have definitely come to the wrong place, but both sides definitely get their licks in and show off some brutal kicks. Like always, Hwang dominates the fight, the viciousness of his kicks unable to be tamed even for the screen, with Yong-cheol spending most of it on the defence, until the two of them are sent tumbling down a mountain of gravel while still going at each other. As expected, ultimately Yong-cheol makes a comeback, but there's certainly no doubt left at the end of it as to how Hwang gained his formidable reputation.

Ultimately *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws* is an entertaining snapshot of early 80's Korean action. The suits are sharp and action is raw, even if not as frequent as some may like. However much like Hong Kong's Chow Yun Fat, Han Yong-cheol has a level of charisma that allows him to carry a movie by himself, so when you throw in Hwang Jang Lee, things are never going to be that bad. While it lacks the goofier elements that made me so endeared to Korean kung fu flicks – there's no bizarre instances of wirework or outlandishly whacky characters – for those that like their action served poker faced, shortly before being kicked in it, there's plenty to enjoy here.

**Butterfly 18 (Taiwan, 1979: Ko Sih Hao) - The Secret of Shaolin Kung Fu** - I couldn't quite work out what relevance the title has (there's no secret and it's got nothing to do with Shaolin) but this is still another good example of Li Yi Min's abilities.

The story begins rather unusually with an old quadriplegic man, carried in a sedan chair, visiting old colleagues who each immediately commit suicide as if repaying an old debt. A flashback explains the circumstances that have led to this; many years ago a man had his limbs removed over a case of mistaken identity and the boy in his care was taken by one of those responsible. The boy grows up to be Li Yi Min, of course, who has spent his entire childhood learning kung fu.

In a seemingly unrelated sub-plot, someone is going round killing all beggars in the area. The beggars themselves are looking for a new leader after the last one was murdered. Li Yi Min, in the meantime, manages to get into a number of scrapes, that allow to show off his talent, and also befriends a local beggar. He soon finds himself embroiled in the feud between the beggars and their enemies and also discovers that the man he has come to know as his grandfather is more than just an ageing kung fu master. And then the paraplegic guy turns up again.....for a kung fu movie this is complicated stuff.

The film does feature some excellent kung fu action and Li Yi Min doesn't disappoint especially in the awesome staff fight with the villains henchmen. The plot might be difficult to follow but the action is plentiful and rather flamboyant, especially one scene set in a darkened room; the filmmakers managing to generate an atmosphere of tension and suspense.

Production-wise this is another low budget effort mostly filmed in outside locations; the final showdown being set on the side of a hill. Li Yi Min might not have had the screen presence of Jackie but he would certainly compete on martial arts ability and again we get to see plenty of tumbling and acrobatics and of course his excellent sense of timing.

When the chief villain is finally unveiled it's not a character that has already been introduced to the audience and so the film loses out on emotional impact at the end, despite the excellent kung fu action.

**By Hook or By Crook (Hong Kong, 1980: Karl Maka)** - This mostly forgotten comedy film has probably only been seen by the hardcore Sammo fan. The plot (such as it is) centres on a mysterious Robin Hood-esque thief called the Flower Kid, who the authorities want to capture. The Sheriff (Karl Maka – also the film's director) enlists the help of Skinny Gee (Dean Shek) to track him down. In the course of his travels, he comes upon Fatso (Hung, obviously) who is masquerading as the Flower Kid. They strike up a friendship of sorts and together go in search of the real Flower Kid to help rid the town of a nasty villain in the form of the Golden Killer (Chung Faat) and his gang.

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK doesn't start too promisingly and it gets a lot worse before it gets better. The comedy is extremely broad, crude and base, not to mention dated and basically unfunny. This goes on for quite a while and it is pretty much an endurance test to get through it. At various times I was sorely tempted to reach for the "off" button, but I'm kind of glad I didn't now.

Although it never really redeems itself, the movie gets significantly better with the introduction of Wu Ma's character about halfway through. I don't think I'll be accused of giving too much away if I reveal he's the real Flower Kid – an old hero who's given up robbing the rich and giving to the poor and is more than a little cowardly these days. I'm not really a Wu Ma fan – he tends to play slimy unsympathetic characters (and I've never forgiven him for making fun of Sammo in HEART OF THE DRAGON or directing the God-awful CIRCUS KIDS) but there's some mileage to be got out of a rusty old hero coming out of retirement. He's made up as old man, but when he comes out of retirement, Sammo and Shek make him up to hide his advancing years, so you end up having a fairly young man playing an old man made up like a young man...well, it made me laugh, anyway. There are also some wacky costumes that made me smile and a good cameo by Eric Tsang as an unbeatable gunman (cue THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY theme!).

The mark of a good comedy is when you're still laughing after the movie's over and in that respect BY HOOK OR BY CROOK is a winner - I was belly laughing for hours after the movie ended. Trouble is, I was laughing at the one moment in the whole movie that was supposed to be serious. A man stumbles into a family's garden, whips out a knife and stabs a young woman in the back, killing her instantly. The family are understandably distraught at the killer, who sticks around after the event while the grief-stricken father admonishes him with an emotional tirade translated in the subtitles as: "You are too rude!"

The more physical side of the movie doesn't impress too much either. Everyone who has watched WARRIORS TWO will remember the movie was nearly ruined with some ill-placed slapstick humour right at the end with the Dean Shek character, and that's the tone that's used throughout this film. The end fight is handled in pure cartoon style – Sammo gets beaten to a pulp and regurgitates a battery and a table is pulled from under Dean Shek, who remains floating in the air until he realises there's nothing underneath him and then comes crashing down to earth. Funny when it happens to a cartoon cat and mouse, less so in a live-action environment.

So while By Hook Or By Crook is not the complete write-off it appears to be at first, it is far from being a classic movie and I can't honestly see the point of ever watching it again.

**Calamity of Snakes, The (Taiwan, 1983: William Cheung)** - This low-budget Taiwanese horror film capitalizes on both the mystery surrounding one of the five poisons (obviously the snake in this case) and the irrational fear and hatred that some Chinese people might have of them. The result is a disturbing and frequently sick animal snuff film that might make any rational person wish that the entire film crew, not to mention anybody who might gain any psychological enjoyment out of the final product, be killed by snakes.

There's not much to the plot. A construction team building a posh apartment building comes across a huge den of snakes while digging the foundation. Instead of calling the fire brigade to have the creatures peacefully removed, the boss (who just happens to be on site that day) gets into a backhoe loader and starts crushing them, while some of the workers get in on the fun and start killing them with shovels and axes. The apartment is eventually completed, but the snakes are soon on hand to get their revenge against their human oppressors.

Animal rights activists will have a stroke watching this. While we might give the filmmakers the benefit of the doubt that the huge mass of snakes getting killed by the backhoe are fake, the rest are most assuredly not. The filmmakers unflinchingly show us snakes being sliced, gutted, skinned and even victimized by mongooses in a rather unfortunately "set piece" about Midway through. By the time we reach the finale, we want every last one of those despicable human SOB's to die a horrible death involving fright and snake venom. But director William Cheung (**Ninja vs. the Shaolin Guard** and **Death Duel of Kung Fu**) denies us even that, because the pleasurable scenes of people getting killed are mixed with scenes of firemen killing real snakes with flamethrowers. And I'm sad to report that some people actually survive the final onslaught of serpents (although the fate of the mother and daughter was sort of left ambiguous).

Taking a break from how offensive this film is, let's talk about how strange it is. You see, if you follow the opening credits, you'll notice that it has a fight choreographer. That would be none other than Robert Tai, who choreographed most of the early Venom Mob films for the Shaw Brothers and then went on to Taiwanese ninja films like the aforementioned **Ninja vs. the Shaolin Guard**. Why is there a fight choreographer in a horror film about snakes? Near the middle of the film, one of the characters says that for different species of snakes to attack as a group, it could only mean that a boa constrictor is leading them (I swear I'm not making this up). So they bring in a snake wrangler who ends up having a wire-fu duel with a 20-foot rubber boa constrictor(!). The WTF climax also features a duel between a wire-assisted boa constrictor, a bunch of men armed with flamethrowers and a guy

armed with a samurai sword.

As loopy as those scenes are, they in no way justify everything else that we're subjected to in this film. It's just a wrong, disturbing, mean-spirited little film that makes you hope that karma follows everybody responsible for it.

**Call Him Mr. Shatter (Hong Kong/Great Britain, 1974: Monte Hellman, Michael Carreras) - aka Shatter** - In the early seventies after the western world had a "revelation" regarding H-K kung-fu cinema through "FIVE FINGER OF DEATH" and the Bruce Lee films, it didn't take long for some film companies to form a partnership with some of their eastern counterparts to produce "hybrid" productions that would theoretically mix the best of both worlds. H-K studios themselves were most eager to co-operate as this guaranteed a much-desired opening to the western market. Bruce Lee's ENTER THE DRAGON produced by an association between Golden Harvest and Warner Brother was the best known and easily the best film done under such a deal. There was also the MAN FROM HONG KONG starring Jimmy Wang Yu, this one made by Golden Harvest in association with an Australian company. Then there was the pair of films co-produced between Shaw Brothers, H-K's biggest studio at the time, and the famed British horror production house Hammer. These are the Dracula meets k-f flick THE LEGEND OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES and the contemporary thriller SHATTER.

After having killed an African dictator while he was in bed with his white female lover, weary hired hitman Shatter (Stewart Whitman) goes to H-K to receive his payment. However he has the great displeasure of being double-crossed by his employer, who then naturally attempt to eliminate him. He is also repudiated by the CIA with whom he was previously associated as well as being forcibly told by British security officer Rattwood (Peter Cushing) to get out of H-K fast. That's when a nearly desperate Shatter crosses the path of a young k-f master Tai Poh (Ti Lung) and his young female friend Mei Lei (Lili Li) who eventually decide to help him both stay alive and get his payment back in exchange for half the money.

As with all of the k-f "hybrid" productions the film was entirely written and directed by westerners. Hammer contributed by putting forth their big house star Peter Cushing while Shaw sent in young actress Lily Li, their stuntmen crew and Ti Lung, the closest thing they had to Bruce Lee. Neither Cushing nor Ti Lung had the main role though, which is unfortunate, as it is given instead to a B-movie American actor Stuart Whitman. Cushing in the end is only a guest star as the suave and somewhat sinister Rattwood, Ti Lung plays the white hero's, near Kato like k-f fighting sidekick and cutie Lily Li was, what else, the ill-fated oriental love interest. What she is suppose to see in the rather beefy and weary Shatter to fall for him is probably the movie's biggest hole. Basically the film completely rests on the simple idea of setting-up an approximate spy- political like thriller in the exotic location of H-K and showcasing the exotic and dynamic looking martial arts of Chinese k-f. At the time this was of course an entirely new and fresh spectacle for the western audience which was probably considered enough to compensate for the limitation of the plot and the main actor.

To tell the truth, even at the time of it's making there's wasn't really much going for this film. It may look more technically polished than other H-K productions done at the time but otherwise it is as dull and lumbering as the Shatter character himself, who look like your typical hard boiled action man but put on serious sedation. Ti Lung appears after twenty minutes and only begins performing k-f after forty minutes, and it's really nothing fantastic by today's standard even if Ti is a very able performer. The film's great martial highlight comes with a tournament match where Ti Lung pits his southern brand k-f against Thai boxing, Japanese Karate and Koreans Takewendo. It's of slight interest because we see the difference between each brand of fighting but otherwise it remains quite unexciting.

Ti Lung doesn't do much as he is only required to be the oriental strong-silent, stoic type and why he helps Shatter is never made quite clear. Actually, one of the rare real pleasures this movie offers has nothing to do with the quality of the film but simply the opportunity for dedicated k-f fans to see Ti in his prime and to hear him as well as Lily Li speak very good English. It is also enjoyable to spot some familiar faces as extras such as future k-f fiend Fung Ark On (as one of Ti Lung students), Lee Hoi Shan (as the tournament referee), Yuen clan brother Yuen Sun- Hi and Lau Kar Wing (as two of the bad guy's bodyguards). Either Lau Kar Wing or his brother Lau Kar Leung also likely had a hand in the film's action choreography. Future notorious hack filmmaker Godfrey Ho also was the film's assistant director.

The film went through three directors as well as three cinematographers and it wasn't released until 1976 in the western market, by which time the k-f wave was pretty much gone. The declining Hammer House had even closed down shop earlier while Shaw Brothers closed down it's movie making operation in the mid-eighties. In recent years SHATTER was released on video on a restored letter box print but has only at best some value as a mild object of curiosity. This is the only real recommendation the film deserves.

**Cannibals, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Kao Pao-Shu)** - Sit Hon plays the chief of an escort carrying a lot of money in a cart. They are attacked by some bandits who are under Chen Hung Lieh's orders, but when they almost succeed in robbing the money, Sit Hon escapes with the cart and the help of three masked men. When he thanks them, they kill him and hide the loot with the idea to spend the money only a year later.

Chang Yi plays Sit Hon's brother ; when he learns that his brother has been murdered, he goes to the waterfall where that happened and he finds one of the murderer's knife. Then, he finds where they work, in Master Chin's bamboo fabric. There, he discovers some money from the loot in the things of one of the workers, and he helps Master Chin's daughter to escape Chen Hung Lieh's men, this latter trying to force her to marry him, arguing that Master Chin owes him some money. Another superb punch and block movie with Chang Yi. Chen Chen and Chang Yi are excellent in their fights and the plot is good. Worth watching.

**Canton Viper (South Korea, 1983: Hwang Jang Lee)** - Not entirely sure what was going on here but it's certainly a great showcase for Hwang Jang Lee's skills. Despite the absence of subtitles I could at least work out that this is one of Hwang's rare outings as the hero (I think).

Without an understanding of the plot I'll concentrate on the action content. The first major fight comes about 10 minutes in with Hwang Jang Lee taking on about 20 soldier types who attack him in various formations. Aside from his usual dazzling kicks (many of his trademark moves are seen here) he's also able to blow people over by blasting them with jets of smoke from his palms; quite unexpected I must say. Although the victor, Hwang is badly injured and staggers away from the battlefield.

Strangely he seems to be rescued by the wife and kid of one of the men he has killed. The film then goes a bit flat as it develops plot but doesn't deliver much action. There's a short interlude where Hwang Jang Lee comes to the aid of his newfound friends when they are attacked by a gang of hoodlums but aside from that it's really a case of fast forwarding to the end.

The last 17 minutes or so are solid action in which Hwang Jang Lee shows off his amazing kicks again. Hwang bashes his way through a whole host of villains in a well choreographed frenzy of arms and legs. The scene contains some pretty cheesy gimmicks, usually wire-enhanced, but it's all good fun stuff.

Despite the slow paced mid section, this film is well worth tracking down for the lengthy fight scenes that start and end the film.

**Canton Iron Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1979: Lee Chiu)** - aka **Iron Fisted Warrior; Iron-Hand Boxer** - It carries with it traits that are tiring side effects of the kung fu-comedy and one serious misstep here is the casting of Leung Kar-Yan. When asked to perform comedy that is but as the movie rolls along, it doesn't fall into the trap of filling it ALL with comedy. Lee Chiu instead sees the edge and fury that present in a performer like Leung and uses the basic framework better in the latter half therefore. Especially so since much of the action choreography is well done, with many of the set pieces being quite intricate and intense (especially after Leung's training using steel wires and the dubbed in lion roars during his end fight is an amusing, aural inclusion). Ultimately **Canton Iron Kung Fu** is a case of the main elements delivering and the in-between stuff is disposable. It's also fairly rare to say that this is very much acceptable. Also with Philip Ko, Wong Chung and Wang Hsieh.

**Casino, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Tseng-Chai)** - Luo Tian Guang, betrothed from childhood to the beautiful Miss Cui finds her running a casino and introduces himself in a rather brazen fashion by nearly bankrupting the house. The two marry and Luo soon learns from longtime friend Lun Liu that there are other gamblers in town and that he should try his luck with them. After humiliating Hao Li Shan, a conman, as well as one of his cronies, a plan is initiated by the devious gambling crooks and the corrupt authorities to get rid of Luo and his wife.

Director Chang fashions an interesting film about a young man who is poor but is promised to the daughter of a military General. Both of their families ran casinos and when he finds his lovely bride-to-be she is still running the family business. What follows is a kung fu film with a gambling hall backdrop which sets up the story and ultimately foreshadows the typical Shaw Brothers tragic ending. Chang Tseng Chai must have enjoyed the subject because he revisited it in at least two other Shaw films, **QUEEN HUSTLER** and **THE GAMBLING SYNDICATE** both 1975, both starring Danny Lee in the lead and both unreleased on DVD at this time. Chang also directed the action packed and bloody Spaghetti Eastern **THE FUGITIVE** (1972) which had an extremely high body count for a 76 minute film. **THE CASINO** (1972) is also 76 minutes and judging by the gory and hyper violent finale, you'd swear it was directed by Chang Cheh. Chang Tseng Chai also employs some very nice, sweeping camera shots intermixed with extreme zoom

ins and zoom outs that were also showcased in the lean and bloody *THE FUGITIVE* (1972). But unlike that film, the cinematographer here is future director Hua Shan who would later go on to a career in action and exploitation movies.

Yue Hua stars in this interesting basher mixing gambling and brutal martial arts sequences. Hua is right crafty and sly as the righteous and smooth gambler Luo Tian Guang. He's so clever and self assured that you know he's bound to end up badly at some point or other. After he is framed and tortured and just barely saved from execution, he heals his wounds and in the finale goes totally over the deep end instigating a vicious slaughter of the bad guys and takes an extreme amount of punishment before expiring. He's beaten, stabbed with bayonets and shot around a dozen times and still manages to take out a handful of guys before collapsing from his massive wounds.

Yue Hua had quickly become one of my favorite Shaw stars after seeing him as the arrogant but patriotic scholar in the violent Chang Cheh Republican Era martial drama *THE IRON BODYGUARD* (1973). From thereafter I would look forward to anything else the man featured in. His prolific and varied resume includes such classics as *COME DRINK WITH ME* (1966), *DRAGON SWAMP* (1969), *THE WATER MARGIN* (1972), *PURSUIT* (1972), *THE 14 AMAZONS* (1972), *THE BIG HOLDUP* (1975), *KILLER CLANS* (1976) and *LEGEND OF THE BAT* (1977). He also appeared in a fair number of exploitation movies such as *THE SEXY KILLER* (1976) and its sequel *THE LADY EXTERMINATOR* (1977), *THE VENGEFUL BEAUTY* (1978) and *HELL HAS NO BOUNDARY* (1982). Hua is also quite memorable as the kung fu master seen throughout *MONKEY FIST*, *FLOATING SNAKE* (1979). He parades around a town accompanied by boisterous musical cues professing to be the greatest fighter around. During the final scene of the film his true character is revealed in what is the best spot in that film for me. Hua was proficient at tackling any genre and was one of the Shaw's most dramatic and reliable actors. He may not have been as nimble and flexible as some of Shaw's other stable of actors but like David Chiang, swordplay films suited his stature more so than kung fu actioners but even here, Hua handles himself ably letting his acting and ferocious enthusiasm mask any deficiencies his screen fighting skill may have.

Hua's character is so self-assertive, his doom is foreshadowed early on. This is really hammered home when Luo duels in a gambling match with Hao Li Shan who has cheated Luo's friend, Lun Liu as well as a number of other individuals. When Hao is unsuccessful in besting Luo, he sends one of his top conmen, Ju Hsiao San to beat him but he, too, is easily revealed at being a cheat. Ju attacks Luo with a small knife but Luo takes it from him and slashes his wrist as well as breaking his other arm to make sure he doesn't cheat anyone again. At that time, Captain Fan raids Luo's home and incarcerates him. Luo is able to escape the grasp of the corrupt police this time in a rather humorous fashion guilefully utilizing a play on words. Another plan is devised to get rid of Luo. This time the villains pay off Mrs. Cui's long time servant, Zhao Fu, who has secretly lusted after her for years. He also covets the casino for himself in addition to Luo's wife. This is where the violence escalates resulting in the shocking murder of Mrs. Cui. This incident causes Superintendent Ma and his crooked followers to frame Luo for his wife's murder. It is here that Luo no longer remains a cool and suave individual.

It is here the director fumbles the ball a bit. There are numerous occasions where characters could have been built on some more but Chang is more content with focusing more attention on the scheming, conniving villains. While not necessarily a bad thing for an action film, *THE CASINO* (1972) has potential for so much more and seems content for minimal characterization in favor of building to its creatively gory climax. Chang allows the blood to flow freely in a few brief moments throughout the film resembling shots normally seen in a *LONE WOLF & CUB* picture but as mentioned above and below, the film turns into a bloodbath at the conclusion taking on a Chang Cheh aura with the OTT means by which the hero takes out the bad guys as well as the amount of punishment he absorbs before finally succumbing to blood loss and bullet wounds. Lily Ho doesn't escape the film unscathed either.

Even though this beautiful actress is given very little to do aside from look pretty she handles her small number of scenes admirably especially in the suspenseful opener in which it seems right apparent that Luo is about to engage in a brawl after he manages to beat the dealer of the table every time as well as improving the courage of other table participants to lay their money down. Miss Cui steps in determined to stop Luo's lucky streak but she, too is beaten. Only upon revealing who he is does the scene settle down to room temperature. As the film continued I wondered if I would get to see Lily Ho participate in a fight scene. She does in fact get to brawl in one sequence and it's quite shocking. She's wiping the floor with the villains underlings when she suddenly takes a knife in the back followed by another guy rushing up behind her and breaking a huge jar over her head to finish her off! Director Chang more or less uses the shocking scenes of violence to propel his story as opposed to letting his characters do it which, considering the film's title, I was expecting this to be a more character driven piece as the name gives no indication of the violence found in the film itself. While it's not a problem really, the film has potential to be far more than a bloody revenge thriller. Director Chang even indulges in some exploitation shenanigans just before the big finish as a scene cuts away to a close up shot of a busty Chinese hooker having her top removed by the shady Superintendent. The camera lingers on the woman's bountiful assets just before Luo arrives to spoil the scene.

Actor Shek Kin will always be remembered most famously for featuring as Bruce Lee's nemesis in ENTER THE DRAGON (1973), but he is also memorable as the devilish looking Hao Li Shan who is the catalyst by which the all the tragic events fall onto the hero, Luo Tian Guang. Although he exits the film a bit quickly during the bloody free-for-all finale, his villainous looks provide a striking contrast to the other performers and his rough features ensured him a long career as a heavy.

In addition to Hua Shan as one of the two cinematographers, there's also Wu Yu Shen (John Woo) as an assistant director. Liang Shao Sung handles the choreography and he also created the action for the ambitious blockbuster, THE 14 AMAZONS (1972) as well as the gun-fu action of THE FUGITIVE (1972), the KING BOXER (1972) clone THE THUNDERBOLT FIST (1972). In addition to these, Liang also spearheaded the action of the Wu Xia films LADY OF STEEL (1970), THE LADY HERMIT (1971), THE LONG CHASE (1972) and the somewhat bland TRILOGY OF SWORDSMANSHIP (1972). He is also the father of future indy star Bruce Liang Siu Lung who recently appeared as the main villain in KUNG FU HUSTLE (2005).

An interesting cast as well as an enticing pedigree behind the camera enlightens this unexpectedly violent gambling/kung fu hybrid, surely one of the first of its kind that would pave the way for the gambling dramas, comedies and action films that followed. THE CASINO (1972) just barely misses classic status and has enough surprising moments and good performances to warrant a view. It will be of particular interest to those who like their action films done in a tragic fashion which more often than not exemplified the Shaw House Style. Those that like there bashers with a lot of blood and gore will surely get a kick out of the final 10 minutes and the Lily Ho fight was a bit of a shocker in itself. If you lean more towards the later, more stylistically choreographed films post '76, you probably will find little of interest here aside from the few bloody outbursts mentioned above. For all others, it's an obscure film that is well worth seeking out and one I'm glad I added to my collection.

**Cat vs. Rat (Hong Kong, 1982: Lau Kar-Leung)** - Cat and Rat, two students of the same Sifu, are always fighting to determine who is the best Each student battles the Sifu and learns new techniques, hoping to best the other. One day the incognito Emperor is saved by Rat. The Emperor wants to make Rat an official but the Rat doesn't believe the man is the real deal. The Cat saves the Emperor on another occasion and receives the position, much to the chagrin of the Rat. The Rat tries to get revenge with the assistance of his sworn Rat Brothers.

The movie was good for the most part. I would watch it again. I enjoyed Adam Cheng's performance in the movie as Jien Chiu, the Royal Cat. I think he played the part of the serious, straight man well to Alexander Fu Sheng's silly arrogant and annoying Bai Yu Tong, the Brocaded Rat. I also enjoyed Lydia Shum Tin-Ha as Bai Yu Tong's pushy and over the top mother. You can see why Bai Yu Tong turned out the way they did.

Gordon Liu, Kara Hui and Johnny Wang Lung-Wei were also good in their roles but were unable to showcase their fine fighting skills. I would have liked the movie more if these fine actors were given more fight sequences. The fighting was choreographed well in this film, so it is a shame Gordon, Kara and Johnny's superb fight skills were underutilized.

My favorite fight sequences were between the Sifu and his two students. So many different weapons were used as he tried to teach each student that they were equal. Even though these were my favorite sequences, I do think the movie spent too much time in the beginning focusing on the rivalry between the two students. If there had been less of the students fighting maybe there could have been more of Kara and Gordon showing off their skills.

Another waste was Lung Tien-Hsiang as Shui Shueng Pui who announced himself as the River Rat in one scene. Then he wasn't the River Rat at the end. Hsiao Ho plays River Rat at the end but I thought he was just a servant throughout the movie. That was a bit confusing to me. Maybe the subtitles got it wrong but Lung Tien Hsiang should have been the River Rat at the end.

Overall, Cat vs. Rat is an ok movie and should be viewed once by all Alexander Fu Sheng fans. The storyline is good as are the fighting sequences. The actors are excellent in their roles and I also enjoyed the comedy. The Bai Yu Tong character, however, was very annoying in this story and I wanted to slap him a few times.

**Cavalier, The (Taiwan, 1978: Joseph Kuo)** - Decent Joseph Kuo flick, but not one of his best. A granddad wants his granddaughter(Doris Lung) to get married, so they have a contest to find the husband. Whoever can beat her in a



fight, will become her husband. Among the "contestants" were a fat guy(Cheng Fu Hung, isn't it always?), and a midget..so it was kind of a funny scene. Anyway, the "winner" is a Ming rebel who fights her on accident due to being tricked by his brother. The two rebels are on the run, from both the Qings, as well as the girl and her grandfather.(who just want him to marry her).

So there's the story, it's decent but not great. The girl chasing them is the main focus of the story, so it's a little weird when they finally go to assassinate the Qing official(Lo Lieh)they're after, as it becomes all epic. Tons of people, slow motion, etc.

Overall It's kind of funny, and the fighting is solid but nothing special throughout. The finale between the two leads, Doris Lung, her grandfather and Lo Lieh (who goes kinda psycho) is pretty cool. There's also a hilarious camp moment where Lo Lieh bites a mans thumb off and spits it out into his neck, killing him. I'm not familiar with many in this movie, outside of Lo Lieh and Doris Lung. I recognized David Tong (one of the leads) face, but am not sure from where. Above-average indie, worth a watch, the review on the main page is a little harsh imo.

**Centipede Horror, The (Hong Kong, 1982: Keith Lee)** - I came into this film with high hopes. After all, Chinese cinema has famously been known for venturing so deep into the bizarre that almost anything else seems tame in comparison. They also refuse to "play by the rules" in terms of what to depict and who to kill. Chinese movies often benefit from a breakneck pace, which foregoes tension-building in favor of throwing as much at you as the filmmakers can imagine.

A rich young woman goes to SE Asia (presumably Thailand) with some friends against the wishes of her mother. Apparently the woman's grandfather had warned the family to never visit that region. The woman is attacked in the sticks by a legion of centípedes and is hospitalized. The woman experience extreme necrosis from her wounds and eventually succumbs to them (although the fact that centípedes pour out of the oozing wounds upon her death let us know that SOMETHING IS UP). Her brother, who had flown to Thailand just in time to see his sister die, starts investigating his family's background to find out why his grandfather wanted his kin to stay the heck away from SE Asia. And \*that\* will ultimately the brother in harm's way.

First things first: I like how Western movies portray the backwoods of Thailand as a hot spot for old muay thai másters, while the Chinese think of the place as crawling with black magic sorcerers.

So, is this film weird, bizarre and transgressive? Yes and no. It feels pretty standard until the last act, which gives us a White magic exorcism and a duel between black and White magic sorcerers that includes reanimated chicken skeletons, plus a few nasty images to close out the film. The way the villain meets his maker is especially strange, although it sort of makes sense with the film's internal logic. Beware of magic talismans bathed in snake venom.

The most transgressive moment come during a flashback sequence which explains why the grandpa had made the cryptic warning to his family. I find it hard to see Hollywood doing the same thing in a movie.

The finale is basically the Chinese version of the "They're Creeping Up On You" segment from **Creepshow**, but with centípedes. People who get the heevy-jeevies just by looking at creepy crawlers should love this part.

What about the pace? The film starts out good, but bogs down a lot in the second act when the main character starts his investigation. The only weirdness we see is a sorcerer curing a woman of a scorpion spell, with the help of his two pet ghosts (unlike the rest of the magic, the movie actually explains how that Works). It picks up again at the end, but a lot of the tension has dissipated by then. So what should be frightening and disturbing is mainly just weird and gross.

Part of the reason the second act bogs down is because of the sketchy way the magic is portrayed. The film is extremely ambiguous in just how much of the film's events are related to magic spells directed at the victim, and how much of it is an actual curse. If it were more explicitly the latter, than the film might have held a little more tension during the second act, since we would know that the hero is racing against time to solve the mystery and save himself. The nature of the spells and how they function is left to our imagination, and that's okay. But how the hero had encounters with centípedes and visions of kids in red before he went back to Thailand is never explained and eventually forgotten. Were they bad omens? Were they part of a curse? Is it karma? We never find out and it ends up hurting the film.

In his [Asian Cult Cinema](#), author Thomas Weisser described this movie, especially the end, as being a cinematic endurance test. I never felt that, although people with low tolerance for many-legged creatures may feel differently. To me, it was a pedestrian horror film with a few weird, memorable, and even gross moments.

**Challenge of Death (Taiwan, 1980: Lee Tso-Nam)** - In 1976, independent studio Seasonal Films and producer/director Ng See-Yuen, one of the greatest eyes for talent in the business, cast Don Wong Tao with a couple of newcomers, John Liu and Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee, in his newest film, *The Secret Rivals*. The film had a novel gimmick: two fighters, one a master a Southern hand-based style and one a kicker, team up to take on a seemingly invincible villain. Don Wong Tao was cast as the Southern hung gar expert, although he does plenty of solid kicking, too. The film was a success, kicking off the careers of all three of the stars and creating a mini-genre of films that followed the same general idea: a hand-based fighter and a superkicker team up to fight a super-strong villain. You really should see the film, it features some of the most realistic traditional choreography in the history of the genre.

However, for whatever the reason, Don Wong Tao had a falling out with Ng See-Yuen and ended up in Taiwan, where he would become one of the greatest names in Taiwanese kung fu cinema. Accompanying him was Tommy Lee, who had been the choreographer of *The Secret Rivals*, and would go on to be one of the country's most talented action directors. The same year *The Secret Rivals* came out, the two teamed up with director Lee Tso-Nam and superkicker Dorian Tan Tao Liang, who had been John Liu's teacher, to make a film in the same mold as *The Secret Rivals: The Hot, The Cool, and The Vicious*. The film has become an independent classic, mixing some really good fight choreography with a Spaghetti Western feeling and an actual plot involving cops, government agents, and a gang of counterfeiters. Fans of the genre should see, for how many films feature a super-powerful villain who's a hunchbacked albino with a bad leg?

*Challenge of Death* is a follow-up to that film, as it features mostly the same cast, the same action director (Tommy Lee), and was also directed by Lee Tso-Nam. It's an above average kung fu movie with a pretty good story and some quality kung fu. Let's take a closer look at it:

Setting: Republic Era China. Lu (Tan Tao Liang, *The Leg Fighters* and *The Himalayan*) is a security officer on the tail of a gang of munitions smugglers whose client is one of the warlords in the region. While trying to get to the brains behind the operation, Lu arrests a womanizing gambler named Cheng (Wong Tao, *Phantom Kung Fu* and *Death Duel in Kung Fu*). Cheng's old girl friend, Wu Ching-Wah, is a courtesan who supposedly works as a mediator between the smugglers and their clients. While accompanying Cheng across the countryside to be judged, the two strike a deal that if Cheng helps Lu find the head smuggler, he'll let him go free.

Arriving in "the town", Cheng is looked up by Wu, who's living in a Mongolian-style tent outside of town (obs: Wu dresses like a Mongolian and her bodyguards are Mongolian, too). We find out that Cheng and Wu have a get-rich scheme involving the Warlord's agent, who's due to arrive in town with the payment for the next shipment in a few days. That night, when Cheng and Lu go to the inn to get some shut eye, they run afoul of a couple of thugs working for the town's richest man, Mr. Sun (Chang Yi, *Ming Patriots* and *Eagle's Claw*). After beating them up, they report back to their boss and complain about their beating. Mr. Sun sends more men out to kill the two, but they too are unsuccessful.

We find out that Cheng and Wu's plan is to delay the meeting between the agent and Mr. Sun for a day, during which period Wu will set up a gambling match between Cheng and the agent. Cheng will win all of the agent's money and him and Wu will become quite wealthy and get married and all that jazz. The agent arrives and all seems to be going according to plan, until Lu shows up at the gambling match dressed as an old woman and ruins their plans. Cheng and Lu get into a fight, which ends in a draw, leading them to strike up a friendship to bring down Mr. Sun. Unfortunately, Mr. Sun's men had been following everything that was going on and Mr. Sun is soon on to the plot to steal the agent's money before the deal can be made. Mr. Sun starts taking a more active role in the proceedings and soon the bodies start piling up.

One thing that you might notice is that the film actually has a plot that doesn't hinge entirely on revenge, superiority of kung fu styles, or rival masters. It's a crime story about a cop trying to bring down a smuggling ring set in a time and world where everybody important knows kung fu. If you think about, there are actually a number of similarities between this film and *Jackie Brown*. Both films feature characters who are out to cheat an arms dealer out of his money. Both films feature law enforcement officers who are more interested in bringing down the arms dealer than the attempts by the other characters to cheat the latter out of his money. The difference here is the the arms dealer, Mr. Sun, is a lot smarter than Samuel Jackson's Ordell and is able to catch on to what's going on a lot quicker than his Tarantino-scripted counterpart...that and the copious fight scenes, of course.

Nonetheless, it is the real-world context that becomes one of the film's greatest strength. Where so many films in the genre seem to take place in a world where martial arts clans and schools have unlimited power and can kill each other off without any involvement from law enforcement or stuff of that nature, this film feels a lot more realistic

and the realistic approach to the story actually makes some of the more fantastic elements of the fight scenes easier to swallow, to be totally honest. It's almost like what our colleague El Santo said about the difference between H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. The former put more fantastic elements into his stories, but tried to give them a real world context, whereas the latter had more "accurate" science, but seemed to isolate his stories from the rest of the real world, much like so many kung fu movies that seemingly forget that there's a world outside of martial arts. One of the reasons Lee Tso-Nam is considered to be such a great director is that he was able to put a real world context into his films, often times dealing with lawmen and criminals, and thus give his movies a realistic feeling. This is a prime example of that.

The action here is pretty good and feels quite realistic, too. Tommy Lee had a knack for choreographing traditional styles in a way that seemed natural and believable. The movements are authentic, but he doesn't use undercranking or an excess of acrobatics that make the fight scenes seem over-choreographed. In the film, Wong Tao is saddled using the snake style, which he does quite well here (some of the better snake fist I've seen onscreen). Tan Tao-Liang uses his usual kicking skills and compliments his kicking with some handwork taken from the Southern Dragon style, which he does fairly convincingly. I do admit to being glad that they chose the Dragon style to compliment Tan's kicks with, since the Dragon style gets very little attention in film, at least as an individual style. The big gimmick to the action here is villain Chang Yi, who uses the mysterious Northern Spider style. The style itself looks like a combination of the Eagle and Mantis style, but the hook is Chang Yi can shoot out cords from his sleeves, which he uses to hoist himself in the air and swing around and kick or grab people. He's the Spider-Man of the martial world here, and it's quite entertaining and original.

There are a few minor quibbles about the film: The wirework used in Chang Yi's fight scenes is a bit awkward at times. There's a scene early on where Tan Tao Liang and Don Wong Tao dress up as an elderly couple in order to win a bunch of money at a casino. It's only tangentially related to the main plot, but it is a bit silly. Also, one of the strengths of *The Hot, The Cool, and The Vicious* was that the film didn't simply end after the main fight; the film made an effort to show what the characters do after beating the villain. That's not the case here, as we simply see our heroes walking away after killing the villain, leaving one plot thread unresolved.

*Challenge of Death* comes as a breath of fresh air after watching so many cookie-cutter kung fu films that depend on the quality of their fights to make up for the lack of originality (or sense) in their plots. The story is solid and the fighting is quite good. The actors are casted according to their strengths (Tan is better suited to playing the righteous cop, Wong is a bit meatier as the gambler-turned-good guy, Chang Yi is an excellent villain as always) and the direction is solid. It's not quite a classic, but a very good film by genre standards.

**Challenge of the Lady Ninja (Taiwan, 1983: Lee Tso-Nam) - aka Chinese Super Ninja 2** - By rights, this movie shouldn't work. It's a cheap, unbelievable mishmash of borrowed plotting, silly characterization, and over-the-top ninja stunts. Not nearly the cynical waste that, say, *Ninja Phantom Heroes* is, but one really shouldn't expect it to be better than, say, *The Furious* or *Shaolin Devil*, *Shaolin Angel* -- in fact, objectively, it should be quite a bit worse.

Instead, though, this is one of those divine accidents, where everything wrong comes together to make something right. Like *Starcrash* or *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, somehow all of the pieces of crap spontaneously become something greater than the sum of its parts. It's a movie that makes me want to just the text of the review and just give you an entire page of screencaps.

Borrowing liberally from the same background that informed Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury* (and which later also gave us *Fist of Legend*), our story is set during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in the early days of the Twentieth Century. At least, it's supposed to be, but apparently they only had maybe seven dollars for period costuming, so aside from the occasional ninja suit or Japanese soldier's uniform, most everyone is dressed circa 1980. The clothes, and the accompanying shag-lite haircuts, makes it seem like the Japanese were squatting in Shanghai for eighty years.

Anyway, over in Japan, young Wu Hsiao-Hui (which sounds like "Wu Sha-Wei," but the spelling's right off the video box) has been training with a ninja clan for the last seventeen years, thanks to her father's longstanding friendship with the ninja master. Her final test involves her dressing in her bright red ninja suit, and fighting off scores of ninja underlings in a trek through the woods. Along the way, we get to see plenty of the ninja-magic falderall that we've come to know and love, such as wirework that defies the laws of physics with baldfaced aplomb. Hsiao-Hui also does a trick like Superman does in the Fortress of Solitude in *Superman 2*, making herself appear to be in three places at once. Always love to see another impossible trick added to the ninja bag. Plus, she's got a gender-specific gimmick -- when disarmed and surrounded, she does a Wonder Woman spin and magically exchanges her bright red ninja suit for a skimpy pink bikini, which she graciously shakes for her captors. The male ninjas can't help but be overcome by lust (they've been too long in the barracks of this otherwise all-male ninja school, methinks), and leap on her, whereupon she teleports to safety.

Her final task requires her to pass by Koloda, the other star pupil (and yes, I know that "Koloda" can't possibly be a Japanese name, but that's exactly what it sounded like, the tape has no closing credits, and the IMDb has only minimal credit info, so live with it). despite his condescending manner to her, Hsaio-Hui manages to use both her ninja skills and her brains (and a magnet which inexplicably emits a high-pitched whine) to gain the goal of the test, a ninja badge.

When it comes time to graduate her, though, Koloda pitches a fit to the master, mainly because Hsaio-Hui's Chinese, and a woman, and he's sore that she beat him. (I'd think that if he had any legitimate objections to her training, he had a full seventeen years to voice them.) He even tries to attack her as she leaves the stronghold, getting a slapdown from the Master for his efforts.

Why's she leaving? Not only to seek her fortune; her father back in Shanghai has been killed. Ready for a chunk of backstory? Good. See, Hsaio-Hui's betrothed to Li Tong, a moustachioed dandy with slicked-back hair who, five years ago, inherited the Grand Poobahship of the Sung-Yi clan from his father. In that time, however, he's become an obsequious collaborator with the Japanese, and Hsaio-Hui's father snuck into his house at night to force him to give up either his quisling ways or his miserable life. Unfortunately, thanks to Li Tong's bodyguards, Dad left Li Tong's house as kibble.

Hsaio-Hui immediately hooks up with the "revolutionaries" (somebody shoot the translator, as it's kind of hard for resistance fighters to be "revolutionaries") and swears vengeance on Li Tong. Boy, she sure is cute when she's angry. Actually, she's just plain cute as a basket of kittens, no matter how you cut it -- a rare and desirable trait in a lady ninja. (Granted, the leader of the trio in *Lady Ninja: Reflections of Darkness* was mighty easy on the eyes, but that movie was also as irritating as cracker crumbs in your jockeys.)

That night, she goes over the wall into Li Tong's grounds in her bright red ninja suit. (I was kind of hoping that the red suit was one of the handicap conditions of her graduation test, but no, that's her permanent ninja attire, camouflage be damned! Might as well be wearing bells...) She's immediately discovered, probably thanks in large part to her bright red ninja suit, and beset upon by Li Tong's four idiosyncratic bodyguards. She only just barely escapes, thanks to a mysterious rescuer in a skull mask.

Realizing that a single lady ninja in a bright red ninja suit may be inadequate, she sets about to recruit a few fellow females to train. Unfortunately, since she's not the teacher she considers herself to be, one of her students ultimately turns to the Dark Side and... whoops, sorry, wrong movie. To make a long story short, she recruits a kung fu expert, a virgin (that's really all we're told about her), and a girl from the local brothel named Chi-Chi.

The next five minutes are the "comical training" sequence, with the girls straining in flexibility exercises and such. Given the sheer number of ropes used in this, it was almost like looking at a collection of old men's adventure magazine covers, with beautiful women in skimpy clothes tied up for Nazi gorillas. And somehow mud wrestling is part of the core training regimen. Who knew?

We don't get to see how they train for those mystical ninja powers, but the girls soon get them: In fact, Chi-Chi uses them in two scenes in quick succession. In one, she invites a fat man into the revolutionary hideout with an offer of marriage and shakes her moneymakers for him -- then teleports out of his embrace. (No, the scene has nothing to do with anything at all; nevertheless, I can't complain about its presence, given the quality of the shaking the moneymakers receive.) In the other, she comes out of the lake where she's been practicing the old "breathing underwater through a reed" technique (wearing a bikini -- probably the most blatantly anachronistic costuming in the whole movie) and attracts the attention of four buffoonish Japanese soldiers. She lies around on the grass, glistening and purring like she's in a Swimsuit Issue photo shoot, and when they try to jump her, she teleports away, and she and her ninja sisters kill them all.

That second scene, while unquestionably silly, actually impacts the plot, as Li Tong is given a dictum by the Japanese captain to bring the soldiers' murderers to justice within three days. So battle is joined in earnest.

Much of the rest of the movie is concerned with taking out Li Tong's four Japanese-provided bodyguards, each an idiosyncratic character -- a girl, a super-strong bruiser, a rail-thin Japanese with a spider tattooed on his head, and a guy who uses a razor-edged boomerang and a spiderweb net. (As a revolutionary leader explains in a briefing, "From the information I could get, each one's different. They're individuals, with their own habits." I guess all those counter-Borg strategies are right out the window, then?) The fights with the four of them have varying levels of novelty, with the most memorable being Hsaio-Hui and Kung Fu Girl in their skivvies, fighting in what appears to be a wrestling ring with two inches of baby oil on the mat. Hoo-WEE!

By the end, we've had further intrigues, some reversal in who our friends and enemies are, the revelation of the mysterious skullfaced man, and naturally a showdown between Hsaio-Hui and Koloda (who's become personal bodyguard to the Japanese general) with all the ninja tricks you can imagine, plus a new one (Koloda spins into the ground and tunnels!). But we all know that nothing can overcome a lady ninja in her bright red ninja suit.

The fight choreography is quite good -- both technically precise, and flamboyantly interesting (as opposed to, say, *The Furious*, in which obviously expert fighters still delivered ho-hum battles). In fact, that's what carries the whole movie: The flamboyance with which everything is carried out from beginning to end. The filmmakers may not

have had much (they may not even have had as much as they thought they had), but the one thing they did have was plenty of energy, and they put it front and center in front of the camera. (Well, that and ... you know.)

Movies that shouldn't work but still do -- it's like finding a piece of driftwood that works perfectly as a coatrack, or a potato in the exact likeness of Art LaFleur. It's a happy accident, a piece of found art; such movies are like food and air to people like me. Viva les lady ninjas!

**Challenge of the Gamesters (Hong Kong, 1981: Wong Jing)** - If you thought that films like 'Conman In Tokyo' and 'God of Gamblers : The Early Years' were just examples of Wong Jing rehashing the old ideas that had made the original 'God of Gamblers' such a success, then this 1981 production shows that he's been doing it for a lot longer than that.

Coming from a background where gambling was never given much importance it's difficult to imagine that the fate of a country can be decided at the card table but leave such disbelief aside and 'Challenge of the Gamesters' becomes pure entertainment from start to finish.

Playing on the idea of super gamblers who never lose, the story takes place in 1930s Shanghai when the city was split into sectors under the control of various super powers that had been making inroads into China. The Chinese government suspect that a new arrival on the gambling scene (Chen Kwan Tai) is an agent for the Japanese and hire the most famous gambler in the city to investigate (a trained investigator would have been the logical choice, but then there would be no film). Patrick Tse Yin is super-suave especially in the way that he uses his deck of cards as weapons and also in that he always seems to have an answer for everything.

Helping in the mission is sidekick and upcoming gambler Wong Yue in a role that's tailor made for his cheeky chap routine. The gorgeous Wong Hang Sau also appears providing more than just romance and glamour.

Covering all bases Wong Jing mixes high tension gambling drama with comedy and over the top kung fu action. The gambling scenes are quite ingenious especially a Mahjong game which involves intricate kung fu moves as the contestants 'fight' over the cubes.

The action scenes are often ridiculous, such as the snooker fight at the start and Patrick Tse's amazing skill at throwing cards, but always entertaining. The culmination is an exciting shoot out in a warehouse setting that carries traits of the heroic bloodshed genre that was to follow soon after.

**Challenge of the Masters (Hong Kong, 1976: Lau Kar-Leung)** - The film is an "origin story" of sorts to the character of Wong Fei-Hung, whom Gordon Liu plays masterfully here. Jet Li did such a good job of making him seem like a righteous and invincible badass in the Once Upon a Time in China series, that it may come as a shock here to find the character portrayed as a clumsy, unsophisticated, buffoon of sorts, prone to bouts of self-pity and frequent temper tantrums. This is all for the sake of the film however, as Challenge of the Masters presents the ultimate journey in martial arts cinema by taking the "unteachable" teenage Fei-Hung and details his transformation into China's most well-known folk hero.

The film's plot centers around rival kung fu schools, and their quest for notoriety in the martial world through their participation in the pao competition, a no-holds-barred sport where a bunch of batons are fired into the sky whereupon the schools make a mad grab to collect as many as they can. It comes off as a cross between European rugby and schoolyard jungle ball. The competition is both fun and action packed, as mobs of kung fu students hurl themselves into the air and at each other in order to collect as many batons as possible.

That's all gravy in this reviewer's eye however, as Challenge of the Masters finest moments swirl around the meticulous and delicate relationship between Fei-Hung and his revered teacher Lu Ah-Tsai, played to absolute perfection by Chen Kuan-Tai. This relationship is definitely a product of director Lau Kar-Leung's watchful eye, who made a point of bringing real kung fu, in both its physical and philosophical forms to audiences worldwide. Every moment of Fei-Hung's training is absolutely compelling, as Ah-Tsai's teachings resonate not only during the training scenes themselves, but throughout the rest of the film as well. I'd go as far as to say that this is the definitive teacher / student relationship in martial arts cinema, and I wouldn't even think twice about it.

The training itself is both grueling and brilliant in its economy as Lau Kar-Leung manages to not only squeeze two years of practice into about twenty minutes of screen time, but also makes it completely believable. He quickly cuts the brash and overeager Fei-Hung down to size with weeks of arduous stances and tedious basic footwork patterns. It's the typical stuff you've seen in hundreds of kung fu films before, but never as raw and undiluted as you will see here, with a reclining Ah-Tsai puffing away on his pipe while literally beating the proper stances out of Fei-Hung

with a long bamboo pole. Fei-Hung definitely has his moments of cockiness and from time to time challenges his venerable master, going as far as ambushing a relaxed Ah-Tsai, who is reading a book. The older master, without batting an eye, spins himself around and slaps Fei-Hung away with the manuscript before continuing his reading.

After months of staff training, in which Fei-Hung must focus intently on the tip of the pole while drawing miniscule circles around ceramic teacups without breaking them, Ah-Tsai takes a brief moment to drop a philosophical nugget on his now-cultured student. He mentions that after two years of training in the martial arts you will feel like you have learned everything, after twenty however, you will feel that you really know nothing. A life in the martial arts means endless discovery. Even a master can learn from the student. The student absorbs this grain of wisdom and in a climactic final test amidst pouring rain, manages to snatch the tobacco pipe from his master's hands, thus completing his training.

I know that more often than not, people consider martial arts actors "martial artists" first and "actors" a distant second. But I challenge anybody to make that same criticism of Gordon Liu in this film (even more remarkable when you consider it was his first starring role). When he descends from that mountain, his belly full of knowledge, and mourns the grave of a deceased brother an old friend notices him and begins staring. A stoic and transformed Fei-Hung asks, "What's wrong, don't you recognize me?" to which the friend replies "Yes. But you look... different." The transformation is complete. The clumsy teenager is now a master himself, carrying himself with so much dignity and righteousness that even old friends have trouble recognizing him.

Director Lau Kar-Leung plays the film's main villain, a murderous criminal from the north who has no qualms whatsoever about kicking respected masters to death with iron-tipped boots. When the virtuous Wong Fei-Hung finally confronts the man, he easily beats him with his newfound long-pole skills. The cowering killer retreats to a bamboo thicket, where a surprised Fei-Hung suddenly has trouble utilizing his sweeping staff techniques. The staff is no longer useful and must be discarded... a martial artist is always learning indeed. Even in the heat of battle his teacher's wisdom rings true.

**Challenge Of The Tiger (Hong Kong, 1980: Bruce Le)** - Keeping the Bruceploitation away from the feature product (but probably not from the promotion), Bruce Le's Challenge Of The Tiger provides sincere B-movie energy. Meaning a genuine sense of innocent B-movie fun with a keen eye for what he's giving back the world. That is specifically himself and Richard Harrison (pre-IFD days) as two CIA agents tracking down a formula that kills sperm. Something that can't fall into the wrong hands, like Hwang Jang-Lee's for instance...

It's wise not to ask too many questions about the formula but instead enjoy the concoction on screen that is often mighty entertaining. Harrison's character loves his women so naturally, because this is adult entertainment after all, we get a slow motion sequence with his women playing tennis topless (a scene reportedly directed by Harrison himself). Him and Le stop by both Spain, Hong Kong and Macau in their hunt but it's in the former country and a bull fighting arena the film's premium sequence is offered up. After some high kicking and sharp shooting, Le is facing off against a bull. Using some unexpected filmmaking skill here, mixing a bully dummy and probably a double, it's capped in crazy fashion when the demise of the bull is given an X-ray shot a la Sonny Chiba's Street Fighter! It's enough lunacy for the movie to live on because it can't live up to it for the remainder. Nevertheless, some crazy dubbing and genre favourites Bolo Yeung, Kong Do and Hwang Jang-Lee are there to further confirm Bruce Le knew what product to crank out. It may not be refined B-movie art, but shining as a powerful fighter and a sincere sense gets you a long way and especially so since Le doesn't tip his toe in Bruceploitation at all really for this one (he doesn't even take off his shirt very often).

**Challenge the Dragon (Hong Kong, 1974: Ngai Hoi-Fung)** – aka **Only the Brave Stands** - Apparently shot for change found down the back of the sofa, this is a very formulaic poverty row kung fu flick, with endless back-and-forth and to-and-froing fights and running, and little else to show for it. The cast is mostly unknowns, though Shih Chung Tien is cool as the Japanese villain. The lead, Tong Lung, is a freaky Bruce Lee lookalike who is so absurdly ripped he looks ridiculous, very rigid and big bodied, can't run properly, and has the charisma of a welk.

The audio track for the US print was redubbed in Europe, with voices familiar from Italian horror flicks. The sound FX is a weird mixture of new effects (footsteps, birdsong) produced during the dubbing, and the original Chinese sound track, which is never synced properly and often has punches sound well before the action on screen. And why is that one character called Brother Matthew, when everyone else is referred to by their Chinese name?

**Challenger, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Eric Tsang) – aka The Deadly Challenger** - Starts out as a kung-fu comedy, with some above-average fighting for the first half of the movie, and seemingly not much of a story. The fighting and David Chiang's character and his shenanigans carry it to the better second half, where the story gets dark, and the action gets great. The action basically gets twice as good as soon as Phillip Ko fights for the first time. From here on out, the mood also goes from comedy to almost a thriller, as we get some back story on the characters. Phillip Ko yells like a mad man, chases, and kills people, and the settings and atmosphere that accompany help set the tone.

The fighting is solid at first, but great in the last 20 minutes. Two memorable scenes are David Chiang and Norman Chu fighting against a gang of people wielding staves, and then people with rings. The other is of course the finale, which is just some fantastic hand to hand between Norman Chu, David Chiang, and Phillip Ko. This may be the best fighting performance I have seen from Norman Chu, and while I'm not sure I'd say the same for David Chiang and Phillip Ko, they were great here too.

The plot is actually decent overall, there is just enough mystery surrounding the characters' intentions to make it better than the average fu fare. It definitely starts out seeming like another fight fest, but has slightly more to it than that. No it is nothing great, but I have seen far worse plots. David Chiang's character is great, as he plays a smart talking smug guy who fits him perfectly. Phillip Ko being slightly psychotic is also welcome. The comedy was pretty good to me, David Chiang's character cracked me up a couple times, as did the dub and some slap stick choreography.

The shift in tone of this, and really the feel of the movie overall reminded me of another (in my opinion superior) movie, Killer in White.

**Champ Against Champ (South Korea, 1980: Lee Hyeok-Su) – Twelve Gates of Hell** - Godfrey Ho packed his bags and headed to Korea for this one, a standard tale of a hero who has his poisoned leg amputated, and ends up being healed by the girl who just happened to have a one-legged grandfather that created a kung-fu style for such disadvantaged heroes. 'Champ Against Champ' features an all-Korean cast headed by Bruce Lee clone Dragon Lee, and featuring familiar names like Eagle Han, in a movie which looks like it was made in the middle of the Korean winter.

This isn't just given away by the snowy landscapes, but even on the indoor scenes when characters are sitting around in restaurants, their breath is clearly visible with every word they utter. & what awesome words they are! Clearly dubbed by a group who were having a great time, someone is called some type of fool every 5 minutes - stupid fool, worthless fool, wretched fool - as well as more elaborate insults, such as when one character is called a "treacherous mule headed old bastard", and then a "pox ridden old bastard", within the space of just a few minutes. 'Champ Against Champ' also delivers some entertaining fight action. Dragon Lee tones down the Bruce Lee mannerisms here, essentially playing a non-clone character, and his performance is a lot better for it. Like most Korean kung-fu movies, the fights are kick heavy thanks to the taekwondo influence, and everyone involved seems like a competent screen fighter. There are some nice exaggerated blows, and the random appearance of stuff like a fire breathing bad guy, and Dragon Lee suddenly revealing a never before mentioned (or seen again apart from a single scene) smoking hand technique, mean there is never any fear of our attention drifting.

All in all the consistently entertaining dubbing, combined with frequent and above average fight action, make 'Champ Against Champ' a decent enough entry in the low budget kung-fu genre.

**Champion of the Boxers, The (Taiwan, 1972: Chan Lit-Ban)** - Tien Peng plays a Chinese who arrives in a town caught by the Japanese, in order to find a master who knew his father(if I remember well). There, he witnesses how the Japanese are bullying the villagers and he fights with them. Cheung Ching Ching, disguised as a Japanese girl, asks the Japanese boss in order to be one of his assassins and she promises him to get Tien Peng. This doesn't please Chen Hung Lieh, who is the best assassin of the Japanese and they fight with each other.

While Tien Peng is fighting with the Japanese, she helps him to escape and he finally discovers that she is a Chinese and that she is the daughter of the man he wanted to see and who has been killed by the Japanese. When he was a young boy, Chen Hung Lieh was in love with a young girl but she was kept far away from him and he looks for her since his youth. One of the boss' geishas looks like his lover and Cheung Ching Ching discovers that she is really Chen

Hung Lieh's lover and she decides to help them to reunite and tells Chen Hung Lieh that he deserves better than being an assassin. After discovering that his boss has killed his lover while he had promised him to let him go with her, Chen Hung Lieh teams up with Tien Peng to kill the boss' men and Cheung Ching Ching gets revenge for her father.

That's a superb action movie, with a unusual role for Cheng Hung Lieh : while he plays a villain in this movie, he has a human side as we discover that he has chosen to become an assassin just with the purpose to find his lover and live with her. Get this one if you're a Cheung Ching Ching's and Tien Peng's fan.

**Champions, The (Hong Kong, 1983: Brandy Yuen)** - A sufficiently-talented action director can make a martial arts movie out of almost banal activity, if he puts his mind to it. Films like *Shogun and the Little Kitchen* and *The Chinese Feast* married martial arts and cooking sensibilities. The *God of Gamblers* films were able to mix kung fu with mahjong and roulette, when they weren't busy having shoot-outs and inane comedy. *The Magnificent Butcher* has a classic kung fu calligraphy scene and *The Mystery of Chess Boxing* was able to derive a kung fu style from Chinese chess. Not bad for shaking things up.

Then there are those films that try to combine martial arts with other sports. Back in 2001, Stephen Chow made the hugely successful *Shaolin Soccer*, which mixed martial arts, soccer, and CGI to create sport sequences that looked as if the soccer players were the cast of *Dragonball Z*. It took several years for filmmakers to follow in suit, but we eventually got *Kung Fu Dunk*, *Kung Fu Hip Hop*, *Beach Spike*, and the violent Thai film *Fire Ball*. Some neophytes to Asian cult cinema may think that *Shaolin Soccer* was the first film to do this, but those people would be wrong. 18 years before Stephen Chow box-office smash reached theaters, Brandy Yuen (brother of Yuen Woo-Ping) and Yuen Biao (no relation to the Yuen Clan) came out with *The Champions*, the original kung fu soccer movie.

Yuen Biao plays a country bumpkin who knows a little kung fu and happens to be an acrobat of considerable prowess. He ends up going to the city where he becomes the towel boy for a popular soccer team, whose star player is played by Dick Wei. One day Yuen is asked to take Dick's place during a game the latter hopes to throw. Unfortunately, Yuen is unaware of this fact and ends up kicking up a storm, thus winning the game and earning his teammates' ire. After a big fight between Yuen and his teammates, he defects to a rival team and brings a friend of his (Cheung Kwok-Keung) onboard. Together, they lead their new team to the championships against Dick's team.

That's the plot in a nutshell, although I'm leaving out a lot of details. Some of them I didn't catch on because the film I watched was in Chinese with Japanese subtitles. Also, like a lot of action-comedies made in Hong Kong during the 1980s, there are A LOT of random asides and non-sequitur sight gags, a romantic subplot involving Moon Lee (whom Yuen Biao got to sleep with in the English version of *Zu: Warriors from Magic Mountain*) that disappears as quickly as it's brought up. My favorite random sequence is a scene set in a restaurant, where rivals Dick Wei and Cheung Kwok-Keung are dancing the tango with their respective girls, while secretly trying to beat each other up. It's a wonderfully-choreographed and funny sequence that would be copied later on in Yuen Biao's *Shanghai, Shanghai* (1990).

Most of the action is relegated to the football field, which is fine. *The Champions* is a kung fu soccer film, after all. There are lots of flying kicks, Pelé-inspired bicycle kicks, and painful-looking falls on display. Unlike *Shaolin Soccer*, which was dependent on special FX, the sports sequences here are more about showing of the physicality of the performers.

However, if you're more of a fight person, there are some brawls here and there to be seen. An early scene has Yuen Biao fighting off some petty thieves when he arrives in THE CITY. A couple of early soccer matches end in brawls between Yuen Biao and the other players. There's one out-of-place sequence in the movie is one where a bunch of men armed with wrenches and other heavy tools attack Yuen and Cheung. Yuen gets to show off some of his famous legwork in a fighting context here, but the scene is surprisingly violent. Several of the hired thugs get bloodied up really good and one guy even gets set on fire(!). That's pretty strange, considering the rest of the film is essentially a PG action-sports-comedy.

The movie got nominated for the Best Action Design Award at the 1984 HK Film Awards, but lost to Sammo Hung's *Winners and Sinners*. Brandy Yuen (or any of his brothers) wouldn't be recognized for their efforts until the end of the decade, when Brandy worked with Sammo Hung on the classic *The Pedicab Driver*. A year later he worked as a martial arts consultant on the first *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* film. Shortly after that, Brandy became a devout Buddhist and made the film *Master of Zen*, which follows the life of Damo (aka Bodhidharma), the man who invented kung fu. I think he left the film industry at about that time, even though his brothers went on to bigger things.

*The Champions* is also notable for securing Yuen Biao's popularity in Japan. I've commented before that Hong Kong audiences are extremely fickle people. Evidently Japanese people aren't quite so much, and a good portion of Yuen's fan base over the years has been made up of Japanese people. When the Nikkatsu studio tried (unsuccessfully) to save their studio with a historical epic back in the early 1990s, Yuen Biao was brought on to try to boost ticket sales. Said film was *Setting Sun* and ironically, it ended up being the nail in the coffin for Nikkatsu.



Then, in 2002, Yuen Biao was hired to play the kung fu teacher in *No Problem 2*, a Japanese comedy about Chinese movies.

**Chase, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Wong Tin-Lam)** - Master swordsman Shih (James Tien) carries with him the red sword that he has to bring to Han I Chu (Tang Ching) in order to find out the secret behind his father's death. Along the way he is followed, attacked and everyone seems to have a craving for the sword that in Shih's hands is fast as lightning. Director Wong Tin-Lam tells slowly, possibly a bit too slowly before the plot-secrets starts to become revealed. In a quite stagy Golden Harvest production, he is definitely aided by his true collaboration, in every sense of the word, with action director Chen Kuan-Tai. Elevating the narrative with exciting one on one skirmishes and exciting one vs. hundred-battles, in its crude format there's still room for clever stylistic touches. Main one being the lack of a glimpse for us of the fast sword, done through sharp editing and capped insanely well in the finale. Director Wong himself manages to even hold viewer interest through massive exposition in the latter half and despite a less than stellar cast on board to embody all of this, *The Chase* is involving and unusually engaging for a twist-heavy piece. Maria Yi co-stars.

**Chase Step By Step (Taiwan, 1974: Wu Min-Hsiung)** - Two circus performers & talented Martial Artists (Hsu Feng & Wong Goon-Hung) are hired to protect a chest of gold bullion. They must take the gold to a village suffering from a bad drought, with the locals dying of hunger and thirst. The area is rife with bandits who have no intentions of making the pairs journey any easier and seek to get the gold for themselves.

Unlike many Kung Fu films of the era which open with our heroes performing their skills in front of a colored backdrop. *Chase Step By Step* opens with a series of shots showing various circus performers and animals displaying their skills. We then get introduced to the two heroes of the film Lien Ying (Hsu Feng) & Wei Tzu-Wen (Wong Goon-Hung). A formidable pair of fighters hired by the government as escorts on a dangerous mission. The story for this Taiwanese production set during the Qing dynasty is pretty straight forward, its sadly not been executed in the best way. I'm not sure how much of this is down to the filmmakers or the fact the print I caught suffered from some alterations/edits for the international release?. One scene starts very abruptly around fifty four minutes into the film, with a man impaled on a sword. Wei Tzu Yen then says "things are getting pretty rough around here, lets keep our eyes open". This makes no sense at all because its never explained who killed the man or why. Was he one of the escorts killed by a bandit? or was its another villain after the gold?. This scene has clearly been edited in some way but by whom and why?. The lesser known characters who appear as escorts to help carry the gold just seem to vanish from the movie. The above edit I mention might have something to do with that?.

The real reason to watch this film is for the two leads who are capable screen fighters. They might not be the best Hong Kong film fighters of the era but they put on a good performance here. By the time this came out they were clearly moving away from the flailing arms technique of screen fighting. Yet the film does owe a lot to the basher style. Wong Goon-Hung looks the part in the fight scenes and throws some really nice kicks too. He looks better here than he did in the only other film Ive seen him star in *Iron Ox The Tigers Killer*. Actress Hsu Feng holds her own as Lien Ying & gets equally involved in the action as her male counterpart. There's no distracting romantic sub plot here but they do hint at it. Its also nice to see them work as equals rather than having one character saving the other all the time. The fight scenes staged by the trio of Wang Tai-Lang, So Kwok-Leung, & Lam Gwong-Wing vary in quality. Each of the choreographers are probably better known for their acting work. Some of the action is very grounded whilst other bits feature elements of fantasy. With some characters performing super human jumps and leaps. In one sequence a man literally bounces off some water and lands perfectly in a small boat. In another sequence a character makes use of some improvised stilts. Another nod to the circus elements that pop up in this movie. You do get your moneys worth during the finale as Tzu Wen faces the chief villain (Wong Fei), whilst Lien Ying meets his two best fighters. Wong Fei's acting is on top form and he plays a villain really well. Only his fighting performance is not quite as good. This lets the finale down a little without going into too many details. His character has some sort of special palm technique but its never really explained in any way. The only reason you know he has a special technique is because he leaves his hand print on a mans chest during an earlier encounter.

Overall I found this film to be entertaining, but its far from the best example of a Kung Fu flick from the mid-70s. The charismatic Wong Goon Hung is a decent screen hero and Hsu Feng is more than capable as the films heroine. There's a nice performance from the ever reliable character actor Tai Lung, even if he doesn't get that much screen time. Tin Mung & Si Sin Dai get little to do other than aid the villains in trying to obtain the bullion. The soundtrack is made up almost entirely of the *Enter The Dragon* score. It would have been much better with an original

soundtrack that doesn't remind you of another film. This production like so many others of the time would certainly benefit from a widescreen release with restored picture and sound. I caught the full screen English dub released by Mill Creek, the print is laced with print damage and looked very faded.

**Cheeky Chap, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Lee Wing-Cheung)** - A sad and desperate attempt to launch Wei Pai as a Jackie Chan style hero. There's certainly potential here for The Cheeky Chap to be a passable diversion even though it's very clear Wei doesn't possess the charm or charisma of said star. Also why the film completely fails is due to the highly strange and frankly unlikable character that Wei is stuck with (coincidentally, same was true for his supporting role in The Young Master). Never in my life have I seen a so called hero being this devious, evil and strange in his happy go lucky ways and even with that insane arc, the film doesn't even entertain on a ludicrous level. It's tedious to the max and the martial arts action only occasionally sparkles (especially the end weapons duel). It's hard to see the direction Golden Harvest could've taken Wei Pai in but they so missed the point that you can't just emulate someone like Jackie Chan through another player.

**Child of Peach (Taiwan, 1987: Chen Chung-Liang, Chiu Chung-Hing)** - *Child of Peach* is the first film in the Taiwanese "kiddie" fantasy trilogy about Peach Boy, or Momotaro in Japanese, which places the folk hero in a faux-Japanese/Chinese setting and fills it with wire-fu and the sort of strangeness that defines Chinese comedy. It's also rather violent, so if something sounds weird in my description, just repeat to yourself, "It's only a kid's film. It's only a kid's film."

In the Himalayas, there's a magical peach garden inhabited by a magical swordsman and his wife, plus their newborn son. Joining them is a tiny little fairy and three magical animals--a pheasant, a dog and a gibbon--who can turn into acrobatic kung fu kids as the plot demands. I must point out here that the pheasant, whose alter-ego is played by a female actress, goes by the name of "Little Cock." It's only a kid's film. It's only a kid's film. Trouble brews when the evil Devil King shows up in the Garden and steals the powerful Sword of the Sun, which immediately renders the garden a desolate, snowy wasteland, and kills the swordsman and his wife. The fairy places the baby inside a giant peach and sends it to Japan...or China...or Asiaville. Something.

The peach is found by an old, childless couple and raised as their own son. Meanwhile, the Devil King goes to hell and frees his mother and her zombie followers. The zombie grandma (as she's referred to in the movie) begins a reign of terror in the land, slaughtering entire villages and burning them to the ground (It's only a kid's film). A local warlord, an overweight samurai named Melon Knight, gets his best men together to defeat the Devil King. He's joined by a Peach Boy, who has grown up rather quickly due to the fairy's magic. Can they defeat the villain and save the random princess who's been kidnapped because, well, of course there has to be a kidnapped princess!

This is a pretty loopy film, but much (not all) of the wire-fu action is reserved for the final half hour, much like *Wolf Devil Woman*. The fighting itself, brought to you by director and occasional Yuen Clan collaborator Chiu Chung-Hing is passable. It's not as undercranked as it would be in the next film, *Magic of Spell*, and there are some decent acrobatic moves. But until then, there's a lot of comedy that the filmmakers try to mine from the bickering old couple and an extended comic interlude involving a giant, flying and pissing peach. There's some comedy mined from Pang San, who plays the fat samurai, which is of the stereotypical "He's fat, and that's funny variety." But he does get to bust out a few choreographed moves and he does walk away with the hawt princess in the end, so that's ok.

Then you get to the final act, and seams keeping the weirdness begin to burst. You have a human-sized Peach Man that our hero and his (remembering that "he" is played by a "she") animal pals can enter into and control like a Power Rangers Megazord. Little Cock's (It's only a kid's film) method of attack is bend over forward and fire explosive rockets out of her back. You can bet that one major villain character will be blown to pieces before the film's over. And let's not forget a "blowing contest" between Peach Boy and a villain who controls the wind, where both of them blow on opposite sides of a hollow pole until the one of their heads explodes...It's only a kid's film.

**Chinatown Kid, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Chang Cheh)** - After getting into trouble with both the Hong Kong police and the local crime syndicate (headed by Johnny Wang Lung-Wei), Tang Dong (Alexander Fu Sheng) heads to San Francisco to hide out and lead a normal work life. Upon his arrival, he gets a job at a Chinatown restaurant where befriends a co-worker named Yang Jian Wen (Sun Chien), a student from Taiwan.

Unfortunately, It doesn't take long for Tang Dong to find himself in yet another predicament. While on a routine stop at a laundromat, Tang Dong notices men extorting money from the owners. With extreme ease, Tang Dong fights them off and scares them away. As it turns out, the men Tang Dong took on were members of the Green Dragon gang (headed by Lo Meng).

When word gets around that Tang Dong single-handedly beat up a pack of Green Dragon members, a rival gang called the White Dragon gangsters (headed by Phillip Kwok) decide to recruit Tang Dong.

What follows is saga of struggle, wealth, betrayal, friendship and morality...

"Chinatown Kid" is one hell of a movie. It's paced just right with a little bit of everything: comedy, gangsterism, kung fu and even some violent shoot out sequences.

The charismatic Alexander Fu Sheng shines throughout. His boyish charm works perfectly for his character's tough, but naive personality. As for Sun Chien? I like the guy, but he plays an odd character who feels a little out of place. I keep all my reviews spoil-free, so you'll have to watch this movie to see what I mean.

Along with "The Brave Archer," "Shaolin Temple," and "The Naval Commandos"; "Chinatown Kid" features cast members who would be widely known as the "Venoms" a year later. It's only Sun Chien, Lo Meng and Philip Kwok who have chunky roles; Lu Feng and Chiang Sheng are barely in the picture; Wai Pai is the only member who is absent. On an interesting note, this is the only film where you get to see the Venom members sport bell-bottoms and shoot firearms.

"Chinatown kid" also features a lineup of groovy babes: Shirley Yu Sha Li (Life Gamble), Jenny Tseng Yan Lei (Boxer Rebellion), Shaw Yum Yum (Human Lanterns) and last, but not least, a cameo from Kara Hui (My Young Auntie).

"Chinatown Kid" has been compared to Brian DePalma's "Scarface" (1983). In fact, it's easy to imagine Giorgio Moroder's theme playing in the background as Tang Dong rises to power. I personally doubt Brian DePalma drew inspiration from "Chinatown Kid," but the two movies do share a lot of the same qualities, both visually and in plot. But then again, this is Brian DePalma we're talking about (he's often criticized for ripping off everyone from Alfred Hitchcock to Sergei M. Eisenstein).

**Chinese Boxer, The (Hong Kong, 1970: Jimmy Wang Yu)** - Considering it's place in martial arts movie history, I'm surprised this often gets middling reviews, because I love it!

Making his directorial debut, Jimmy Wang Yu proves himself quite the stylist, with lots of funky visuals and intensive editing. As the lead, he seems more natural than usual, with the last traces of his earlier teen idol persona visible. He even handles the romantic scenes well, which he would become increasingly unsuited to as the 70's progressed. The bizzare surgeon's mask disguise he adopts is nowhere near as cool as his theatrical mask in One Armed Swordsman, but it does project a certain macabre quality.

This film is notorious as introducing to the screens the cult kung fu film: fast, violent, OTT, and also for perpetuating that much loved stereotype: EVIL JAPS! I'm not sure whether there was a recent precedent for this in the 1960s HK cinema, but the way this film carries on, you'd think WWII never ended. Lo Lieh is quite a sight in his blond Beetle wig, kabuki makeup, and the King of Leers, though compared to the subsequent fanged gorillas (Lung Fei in One Armed Boxer) and absurdly pony-tailed goons in night gowns (Chin Yuet Sang in Lady Whirlwind) that would turn up, he's Toshiro Mifune in terms of authenticity! Chen Sing and Wang Chung make cool thugs, though Wong Ching's "samurai" does seem to have wandered in from an especially silly Sonny Chiba movie.

The fight choreography is clunky but brutally effective, with eye gougings, chest stomps, beheadings and a very liberal use of ketchup having a surreal cartoonish look that just adds to the fun. The final confrontation in the snow (filmed outdoors) is pleasingly photographed, which makes up for the fact the poor actors are valiantly struggling to keep their balance on the ice!

Add to this an awesome compiled soundtrack (besides the usual John Barry and Morricone sampling, there is a lovely romantic theme) and you have a great kitsch classic!

**Chinese Godfather (Hong Kong, 1974: Lui Gin)** - On the strengths of Bruce Lee showing support and co-star Betty Ting Pei (who was rumoured to be romantically linked to Bruce), **Chinese Godfather** launched into atmosphere, bringing nothing but the utmost generic taste to the popular basher side of martial arts cinema. Michael Chan is asked by a dying man to deliver jewels to his wife (Betty Ting Pei) and kid. More folks want them jewels though, including Hu Chin's character, who seduces Michael Chan, and gangleader played by Cheng Lui. Possessing a gritty look to it but no needed grit for its fight scenes, even at a shortened 75 minutes, **Chinese Godfather** is boredom until it lights up for approximately 2 minutes. You should wake up right at the moment where you thought you saw Bruce Lee and indeed, the filmmakers inserted still shots of him during one of the fight scenes. Subliminal Bruce. Reportedly even more of the action contained this shameful device in the uncut version. The end fight between Chan and Cheng Lui also goes amusing places when it starts to feature a forest of traps and part of it is set in a snake pit. 2 minutes. Remember that. Also with Wei Ping-Ao.

**Chinese Kung Fu Against Godfather (Taiwan, 1974: Lee Tso-Nam)** - *aka Fist of Fury in China* - I watched this hoping for na early 70s basher/Triad film, but got something akin to *Way of the Dragon 2* instead. There were a few of these movies made in the 70s in the Wake of the success of Bruce Lee's classic, like Leung Siu-Lung's *Kidnap in Rome* and this. While a spectre of its inspiration hangs over the proceedings (ex. Lee Kwan was in *The Big Boss*; the alternate title is obviously a cash-in, and Bruce Lee is even mentioned once in the film), this movie does try to be its own creature and actually does some things better than *Way of the Dragon*.

Cliff Wong plays Tong Shan, a kung fu expert from Hong Kong who has arrived in Amsterdam to make his fortune. He's received by his brother, Charles (Eddie Ko) and is put to work at Charles' Chinese restaurant. One day, Charles asks Tong Shang to make a delivery for him. When Tong discovers that the object being delivered is narcotics, he beats up the dealers, throws the drugs into the river, and goes to live with Chinese cabbie Robert Lee (Lee Kwan). Robert encourages Tong to open a kung fu school, and Tong even starts a romance with a Dutch woman (Ine Van Veen) who speaks Chinese. But it'll only be a matter of time before Charles and his gang find Tong Shan and demand their drugs back...

Comparison between this and *Way of the Dragon* is inevitable. The latter is, for the most part, focused on the plot of restaurant owners vs. gangsters. Here, the main conflict doesn't really step into the foreground until the second half. The first half is more of a fish-out-of-water story, showing Tong Shan's struggles to adapt to his new settings and find his place in Western culture. One amusing scene has Cliff Lok entering a chic Chinese restaurant, only to discover that nobody that works there speaks Chinese!

Lee Tso-Nam throws more sex into the film, with Lee Kwan more concerned with sleeping with every White woman he can and trying to get Cliff Lok's character laid. At one point, Cliff almost sleeps with a big-breasted blonde, but stops when he remembers his mom's request that he not bring home a European wife.

Action-wise, the film isn't bad. Kudos to Chan Siu-Pang and Lee Tso-Nam for casting non-Chinese actors who could fight, although one might wonder why Western drug dealers never use guns and why a Dutch kingpin (Jan Willem Stoker) is a martial arts master, too. Chan Siu-Pang makes a valiant attempt to put some real technique into the fights, despite the then-current standard for flailing arms in a basher film set in the modern day. Cliff Lok gets to use his Southern Kung Fu skills a lot, and never resorts to the sort of shapes-less fighting that defined era. His main flaw as a screen fighter is that he lacks power, and thus fails to convince at times that he could beat up some of the people he does throughout the film. But I won't blame Chan Siu-Pang for that. He does a great job with what he's given to work with.

**Chinese Puzzle for the Judo Fighter, A – (1967)** - The hero goes to China in order to discover why his best friend (Clyde) has disappeared or has been killed, I don't remember well. Nice little spy movie in the vein of the 60's movies such as the Shaws' ones (The brain stealers, Angel with iron fists...these latters being better) or the James Bonds' ones. There's the mad ex General of the Reich (French actor François Maistre who played one of the leads of the tv series La dame de Monsoreau (from Alexandre Dumas' book)), the giant expert in judo, who reminded me of Jaws in the James Bonds' movies, the "femme fatale" Marilu Tolo who plays Clyde's fiancée and is a reporter who doesn't fear anything, and the "exotic" girl, Maria Minh, who plays the nurse who took care of Clyde when he was kidnapped by the Black Dragon organization (reminding of the Spectre of the James Bond's movies...). Nice fights between the judoka and the Chinese men, a little bit of humour and a good story.

**Chinese Stuntman, The (Taiwan, 1981: Ho Chung-Tao) – aka Counterattack** - One of the most clever old school kung fu films, I do feel this gets a bad deal from the text extras on the UK DVD who kiss up to the Bruce Lee legacy nuts by bemoaning the loss of John Ladaski's Jeet Kune Do film, and then go on to call Bruce Li's style "flowery." Judging from the film, if not real life, Ladaski is a clumsy oaf.

The main highlight of the film is Wei Ping-ao as a very Lo Wei-ish director/producer. His performance is extremely funny as he goes from sycophantic to tyrannical to appearing to genuinely care. The Shan Lung character seems to be based on Jimmy Wang Yu: a good brawler, wonky kung fu style, inexplicably a popular movie star.

More than any other film I can think of, this illustrates how different the Hong Film industry was from various books on Bruce Lee suggest. We see a Hong Kong film industry trying to keep up with Jackie Chan and the modern action pictures, whilst all John Ladaski can think of is Bruce Lee. The impression one would get from a Bruce Lee book is that Hong Kong devoted all its time into searching for the next Bruce Lee.

**Chivalrous Inn (Taiwan, 1977: Chiang Nan) - Shaolin's Magnificent Disciples; Gangsmen Tavern; Bamboo Forest Guest Inn** - Unfortunately, my copy of this film was so unwatchable that it completely spoiled my enjoyment of it. I couldn't even identify faces let alone read the cropped subtitles, and the only things I had to rely on for plot progression were sound effects and music cues. What a horrible way to watch a movie. Anyway, from what I could tell, an old man runs a peculiar inn called "Martial Inn" where kung fu practitioners can get free room and board if their skills are good enough. He also uses the inn as a place to recruit fighters for the underground Ching resistance. Carter Wong is one of these recruits, but after getting injured in battle he retreats to a valley populated entirely by warrior women. (oh yeah, baby!) There, he spends most of the film getting his wounds tended to by the lovely Lung Jun Er (at least I think it was her - I really couldn't tell from the movie itself). Meanwhile, things are looking bad at the Martial Inn as the Chings attack it and the various leaders from different anti-Ching sects are murdered. In the last thirty minutes, fiery Judy Lee shows up (at least I think it was Judy Lee...) and the remaining anti-Ching fighters retreat to the valley of the warrior women. But it turns out that Carter Wong is a Ching spy and he sneaks out of the valley and leads his men back to attack it. A furious kung fu showdown takes place, leaving all of the Chings dead.

Not much to say about the film except that the martial arts sequences seemed to be competent and well executed. Judy Lee only gets to fight about four times, but performs some pretty decent double sword work and some agile acrobatics. It really is a shame that these classic films have been lost forever and have only been preserved in crappy nth generation pirate tapes.

**Chivalry Deadly Feud (Taiwan, 1981: Tang Chen-Dah)** - When he was a child, Champ Wang was adopted by a noble man and, as years went by, he fell in love with the man's daughter. After the girl's family has been slaughtered, he hid his lover in a secret place and went to seek who were the murderers.

During his chase, he kills some great fighters and their families decide to pay killers in order to get rid of him. Among these killers, there is Tsung Hua, who becomes friend with the daughter of one of the dead men. Together they look for Champ Wang and they discover his lover, who became amnesic after her father's death. Finally, they find Champ Wang and the amnesic girl recovers her memory during the last fight, discovering a terrible truth about her father's death. I don't tell you what this truth it would spoil your viewing of the movie. The plot is interesting, the fights are good and the movie is worth watching.

**Chivalry, The Gunman And Killer (Taiwan, 1977: Hon Bo-Cheung)** - Opens up interestingly enough with a string of senseless killings by female assassins led by Hsu Feng in a red mask. Clearing up the mystery and reasons along the way, the film loses momentum and coherence story-wise and merely works as a decent swordplay spectacle with a recognizable cast (including Yueh Hua, Pai Ying and Lo Lieh).

**Choy Li Fat Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1979: Chan Siu-Pang)** - In a rather generic plotline Cliff Lok tries to join a kung fu school but can only get a job as a servant. By watching the classes and practising at night he secretly manages to learn martial arts, becoming better than the senior, until the other students complain and he is forced to leave. Playing to another cliché the school's teacher is a loyalist rebel in hiding and it's only a matter of time before the Manchu's turn up and cause trouble.

Despite its uninspiring premise, the film still entertains on the strength of the action. There's some very inventive training sequences that exhibit Cliff Lok's pure physicality and martial arts ability. The scene where he practices forms under the guidance of a Buddhist monk teacher is very impressive.

There really isn't too much fight action for the first hour of the film but once it gets going it's definitely worthwhile. Yeung Pan Pan gives a memorable performance, showcasing her flexibility and agility, and proves to be a match for Cliff Lok. Expert fight arrangement from Chan Siu Pang allows for sequences that are fast in tempo and well filmed with long takes. The final showdown arrives a bit out of the blue but it's a classic.

**Chu Liu Xiang and the Finger Flicking Skill (1982)** - A Japanese princess is sent as a gift to a Chinese king in order to bring the peace between the two nations, but she is kidnapped by someone who is impersonating Chu Liu Xiang (Meng Fei) and this one is now chased in all the kingdom as a criminal. He is helped by his three women and two men friends and the Princess is saved by Abbot White, who seems to be a Chu Liu Xiang's enemy. During the movie, we learn that the Japanese general who came in order to protect the Princess is in fact the plot instigator and he becomes Abbot White's friend and both of them plot against Meng Fei. After many twists, the plot is discovered and Chu Liu Xiang wins, as always. Though the fights are good, I'm a little bit disappointed by this movie : Meng Fei appears only in two or three scenes and David Chiang, who is cast as a guest, only appears in two very short scenes, but we don't know who he is and why he fights on Chu Liu Xiang's side ! He doesn't want this one to fight with Abbot White because he wants to kill this one himself but at the end of the movie, we see him fighting with Abbot White, but we don't see the end of the fight because it's the end credits and we don't know who won !!!

As it often happens with these Gu Long's adaptations, there are a lot of explanations which are missing and we don't know why there is hate between two persons, or when they already fight each other and why...

**City Called Dragon, A (Taiwan, 1969: Tu Chong-Hsun)** - Director Tu Chong-hsun's A City Called Dragon is an intriguing link between King Hu's Dragon Gate Inn (1967) and A Touch of Zen (1971). Tu was Hu's assistant director on both of those films and Hu's influence in this film is apparent everywhere – from the main theme of the film (rebellion against authority), the slow drawn out tension of certain scenes, the tracking shots, the percussive soundtrack, the action style and most primarily in his iconic use of actress Hsu Feng. Hsu Feng debuted while a teenager in Dragon Gate Inn as the young girl, but it was in A Touch of Zen that she earned her legendary status as the chivalrous very deadly female warrior fighting for freedom against immense odds. Clearly her character in A City Called Dragon is modeled on Miss Yang from Zen and could almost be the same character at an earlier stage in her life.

A Touch of Zen notoriously took three years to be made and nearly bankrupted Union Film when it tanked at the box office. Hu constructed a small town for the setting and then let it sit in order to give it an aged look. His patience in waiting for the correct shot became legendary as in one such instance when he waited months until some flowers bloomed. It was likely during one of these breaks in which this film was made and though I would have to go back and see it again, the sets in this film looked very much like the ones in Zen and the old mansion is used very much in the same moody haunting manner. But all that said, this is no A Touch of Zen. It is missing Hu's elegance and poetic rhythm as well as his insights into character, religion, politics and gender. Still I quite enjoyed the film though I admit much of that came from my appreciation of Hsu Feng who the director poses beautifully with sword in hand time after time in a near beatific light.

The film takes place during the Sung dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) with Emperor Hsiao Hsia in power and rebels, who are based in the Tai-hun Mountains, fighting for their freedom. Miss Shang is on her way to Dragon City to make contact with rebel Chen Young who has secret plans to hand over to her to take to the rebel stronghold. Before reaching the town, Miss Shang learns that Chen was captured and killed along with 80 members of his family by the Mayor (Shih Jun – the scholar in A Touch of Zen). Her mission now changes to finding the secret plans and killing the Mayor. Everyone in Dragon City is under suspicion and as soon as she enters she is followed by a coterie of peddlers sending rhythmic signals to one another. She has to kill one of them in order to escape their watching eyes but this alerts the authorities to her presence and the entire security apparatus begins to search for her. Just to be safe, the Mayor requests the assistance of Wuo, a vicious killer with a wicked laugh who works for the Emperor. But all is not as it seems. The film is perhaps too deliberately paced but it creates a tense claustrophobic atmosphere and a mood of solitary heroic desperation. The main fault is that the final fight takes place at night and much of it is lost in the darkness – whether due to the transfer or the original is hard to say.

**Clan Feuds (Hong Kong, 1981: Chan Peng-I)** - It's the Hatfields and the McCoys in wuxia land. The Big Flag Clan are super pissed their son Yun Keng is not only in love with the Leng girl from the opposing clan (the Lengs), but Yun Keng got Ms. Leng pregnant too. Can you say Romeo and Juliette? Well, hold that thought.

Romeo and Juliette ?!? This will not do! The Big Flag Clan elder Yun Yi decides Yun Keng will be executed by 5 Horses (drawn and quartered a la *The Heroic Ones*.) Yun Keng's brother Yun Zeng (Lo Meng) attempts to offer himself instead (oh c'mon Lo! This would be your shortest cameo in history!), but no.

Clan Elder pop puts Tie Zhong Tang (Ti Lung) in charge of the execution.

Yun Zeng doesn't like this and flies off to confront Leng Yi Feng. (Damn it, Lo!)

Yun Zeng doesn't know crafty Tie Zhong Tang and a brave clan member spare the guilty lad...but then Yun Zeng rushes off to face the opposing Yeng clan...

and Tie saves Yun Zeng and is then himself saved by Lily Li's Leng Qing Ping...but what there's more.

Yun Zeng just won't stop putting his furry boots in his mouth and implicates Tie and Qing Ping as having an affair (he's still thinks his brother was given the 5 horse treatment...)

Tie is wrongfully exiled because Clan Elder pop believed Zeng's rambling...and so Tie takes Yun Zeng with him. Lo Meng's expression when he wakes up is priceless. and further LOL.. Tie and Yun are befriended by the Smiling Tiger for a moment... just a moment. Remember Hatfields and McCoys...It's a ruse Tie... because the Smiling Tiger of the Lengs wants the Big Flag Clan kung fu manual and their gem, the Light of the Sun.

but Tie Zhong Tang finds both...and...this kind of reminds me *Sword Stained with Royal Blood*, but it's so much more entertaining and convoluted because you get more weirdo characters\*, kung fu and other stuff frequently. One such character is a great Gu Long death-minded assassin, this would be the older gent with the Five Poison Palm boasting a blood sucking sword. Now there's a fellow who could have been quite the villain in another production.

Hey, Pai Piao! Sun Chien! Phillip Ko - nice to see you. Chien and Ko have particularly good cameos and there's a lot of thought to their characters, Sun is particularly crafty. And it's cool to see Philip Ko as an ultimately sympathetic character.

This is where I'll stop the play by play,

Kung Fu wise there's some very good stuff in here - Ti has a wonderful 3 point kick and more than one fun sword fight with folks like Lily Li etc., but the wire work can be sloppy.

Lily and two other ladies get some very good sword fighting moments in too. Lo and Sun Chien also have moments to shine. As usual Sun Chien is more dramatic than fighting, but he's fun here.

Sets and costumes are great. Ti must go through at least three costume changes: From barbarian to usual gallant, then elegant traveller.

And the effects are fun, the aforementioned assassin who wields the blood sucking sword jabs it into an innocent waiter whose face immediately turns white. It is a neat animation - time lapse moment. Completely out of left field and just right for this film. Of course, my mind starts thinking of that sword and the insane vampire-like scenario they could have gone with for that assassin. It is little things like that sword that I wish they have expanded upon.

*Clan Feuds* is a ridiculously entertaining soap opera wuxia. Lo Meng and Ti Lung are having way too much fun with their roles and they are a hoot. Will definitely be watching this one again, and yes, *I think I need a bath. Looks around for Tie Zhong Tang...*

**Clan of the White Lotus (Hong Kong, 1980: Lo Lieh)** - Lo Lieh directs this sequel/remake of Lau Kar Leung's Executioners From Shaolin, the movie that gave us one of Lo's standout roles of the white haired priest Pai Mei (later portrayed by Gordon Lau in Kill Bill: Volume 2). Well, Pai Mei is dead and Lo instead takes on the very similar role of The White Lotus that's is constantly being challenged by anti-Ching fighter Man Ting (Gordon Lau). What it takes to defeat The White Lotus is perhaps a little female contribution. That's where Kara Hui comes in...

Director Lo takes certain beats of Lau Kar Leung's original but mostly ejects any notion of a serious narrative to make room for comedic strokes instead. Both broad ones as seen through Lam Fai Wong's endearing and funny performance but several doses of welcome quirkiness rears its head, which is a style of comedy not usually associated with martial arts, at least not in my experience. *Clan Of The White Lotus* could've taken all its cues from the established kung fu comedy staples of the time but feels very much its own thanks to Lo Lieh's clever direction and the marvelous contribution by none other than Lau Kar Leung, this time acting "only" as action director.

Don't think for a second that he's going in half-assed though. No, Lau's set pieces are as fast and furious as ever with constant high quality and complicated bouts, making *Clan Of The White Lotus* very much resemble a Lau Kar Leung movie after all, but with a twist, which is Lo Lieh's great compliment as head of this Shaw Brother's production. Johnny Wang, Hsiao Huo and Yeung Jing Jing also appear.

**Clones Of Bruce Lee, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Joseph Kong, Nam Gi-Nam)** - Legendary Chinese superstar Bruce Lee just died. A scientist (played by John Benn) - who works with a British organization called the SBI - decides to create clones to fight crime. He ultimately creates 3 clones (with a tiny blood sample...) called Bruce 2 (Bruce Le), Bruce 3 (Bruce Lai) and Bruce 1 (Dragon Lee) - yup, they are introduced in this very order. They go into training to become masters of MA (cause they can't fight at first... The teachers are none other than Bolo Yeung Tze and Kong Do BTW) and are to be used for crime fighting.

While Bruce 1 is sent on a mission in the film industry to take down people linked to criminal business (nobody seems surprised to see a guy who looks like Bruce Lee and has great MA skills, though there's a bit of self-irony when the filmmakers talk of killing their new star and cash in on his death), the other two are sent on a mission against drug dealers in Thailand where they encounter their contact played Bruce Thai (who looks more like Bruce Lee than Bruce Lai does...), a guy who gets assaulted by a bunch of naked chicks (with the Bruces watching the scene but deciding not to intervene - gotta love plain gratuitous nudity) and a bunch of lab-created Bronzemen.

Their separate (as though it was two different movies) missions completed, the clones return "home" and the scientist gets pissed off that all he received was thanks. He shows his true colors and uses the device giving him control on the clones to make them fight each others to the death, as he plans to use the strongest of them to take over the world. But when a nurse betrays the doc and gets the clones out of his sway, our mad scientist sends his henchmen to fight and kill them. Bruce #1 fights Bolo (who dies in a ridiculous manner) and the clones ultimately take down the evil scientist.

That's spoiler-heavy in that the whole movie is summed up in a few lines, but I guess one doesn't watch these films for their mind-boggling plots - go to a Chor Yuen wuxia instead.

The film is of course heavy on Bruceisms, as you have 3 (well 4 counting Bruce Thai) clones and they are supposed to be literal clones. I personally thought this movie was a riot, though Bruce Lai bugged me as he barely looks like Bruce Lee. Bruce Thai or Bruce Li would have been better choices, as Bruce Lai's lack of similarities bugged me. But beyond that, the genre mix, the OTT acting of Dragon Lee and Bruce Le, the fights (the film - being choreographed by Bruce Le - is heavy on animal styles, which sounds weird since I never heard of Bruce Lee practicing those, but whatever... the fights are fun) and just the idea of the movie and the sound of its title (though I think that *Bruce Lee Fights Back From The Grave* can't be topped as far as Bruceploitation title goes) were immensely enjoyable for this Bruceploitation enthusiast.

**Club, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Kirk Wong)** - Ok, let me start by pointing out the obvious; Chan Wai Man is bad ass. He ranks about an 11 on the badass-o-meter, and it only goes to 10. In short, this guy is the real deal. And when he says that this is the most realistic triad movie ever made, you damn well better believe him. Because first, he knows what he's talking about, and second, if you don't, he'll come to your house and kick your ass. Now, with that out of the way, some praise should also rightly befall director, Kirk Wong. He really captures the dark underbelly of early 80's Hong Kong, with a gritty realism, seldom seen at this time. And exposes us to the seedy side of the glitzy HK nightlife, the men who run it, and the women who work there. These aren't cartoon variety triads, flying through the air, wielding double 45's, or doing triple spin kicks. These guys solve their problems with brutal beatings, bats, pipes, choppers, and the occasional outboard motor. There isn't much in the way of stylized action here. Chan Wai Man did the choreo, and it is pretty much straight up street violence. Ugly and bloody, just like in real life. And speaking of realism, you probably couldn't find a bigger stink of authenticity than Chan Wai Man. Besides being cooler than a polarbear's nutsack, and a pretty decent actor, he also worked as a consultant here, giving the movie its street real ambience and stamp of approval. And that's from a man who knows this world intimately. There are a



lot of familiar faces in here, some more prevalent than others. The great Tsui Siu Keung has a cool stint as Chan's dapper triad brother. Kent Cheng gives a nice performance as the loyal club manager, and Fong Yau is also convincing as the benevolent boss. Then you have Philip Ko Fei, Kwan Yung Moon, Wilson Tong and other usual suspects from the school of badguys, dispersed throughout, in supporting roles. The Club is no masterpiece, by any means. But the movie's dark, neon lit visuals, crooked characters and visceral violence, set to bad disco music and cold synthesized themes, is still enough for me to label this a classic HK gangster film. It set the tone for many movies of the genre to come, and deserves more recognition, than it has gotten. Next time you're in the mood for a twisted triad tale, check it out. It is well worth it.

**Cold Wind Hands (Taiwan, 1972: Chui Tin-Ho)** - I will be brief, as, well, it is a pretty slight movie. As a historical curio, it is a kung fu comedy, something that westerners are lead to believe was invented by Jackie Chang or Sammo, but it isn't really funny, and the kung fu sucks for the most part. I looked everyone up on the HKMDB, and for a lot of the leads, this was one of their few credits in a martial arts movie, and you can see why. I will admit, it starts with a decent ambush scene, but it goes downhill fast and was a long 85 minutes. The lead actress was cute, but I think this was her only credit as well. Not exceptionally bad, it just seemed like most of the actors were misplaced, etc.

**Come Drink With Me (Hong Kong, 1966: King Hu)** - A gang of ruthless killers kidnaps Zhang Bu Qing, a government official, on his way to the capital. A letter is dispatched to the Governor, Zhang's father, Zhi Jun demanding the release of the captured leader of the gang whom is awaiting execution. The killers mandate their leader be set free within five days lest Zhang Bu Qing will be killed as well. Golden Swallow, the sister of Zhang, sets off to rescue him but the gang proves powerful. A lowly beggar named Drunken Cat assists her in liberating her captured brother. Unknown to Golden Swallow, Drunken Cat is being pursued by his big brother, Monk Liao Kong who covets the powerful Green Wand previously held by the Head Master of their Green Bamboo kung fu sect. Having secretly killed his teacher for the weapon, Drunken Cat managed to steal it away from his despicable big brother. With two evils to fight, Golden Swallow and Drunken Cat meet with the villains for a final bloody duel.

King Hu's classic of balletic kung fu fluidity is also speckled with occasional bursts of perfectly timed musical cues that enhance the on screen action. Layered with what appears to be an original, albeit traditional Chinese opera sound, this music propels the many lengthy, but deliberately paced action scenes. The music skillfully aids in the slow, suspenseful build to the outcome of the confrontations. A number of panning shots also capture the violence of the battles rather nicely. The only negative, (and it's a minor negative) is that there seems to be two different movies on display here. One involving Pei-peï attempting to rescue her brother, and the second act, (which features less of the Golden Swallow character) dealing with Drunken Cat confronting his martial arts brother who is after a special claim handed down from the previous master of their clan. Also, a group of female sword fighters seem to appear out of nowhere for the end battle more out of convenience than anything else.

It's interesting how influential this film really was on everything that came after it. From Chang Cheh all the way to the incessantly mentioned in America but derided by its target audience in Asia, CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON (2002). One Shaw Brothers film in particular that seems to have been inspired by COME DRINK WITH ME (1966) is the gore drenched THE BLACK TAVERN (1972). Whereas King Hu's film revels in photographic beauty and particularities, Yip Wing Tsui's film revels in gruesome splatter and the shock factor. Both films feature long set pieces inside an Inn (BLACK TAVERN is set almost exclusively inside an inn) and also a singing beggar who croons a tale that explains either a character or situation found in the film. The opening fight scene is quite gory considering Chang Cheh's groundbreaking actioner ONE ARMED SWORDSMAN (1967) hadn't been released yet unleashing a whole new spectrum of graphic violence on screen. The use of smoke in this picture would seem to inspire Chu Yuan who would become obsessed with the use of the fog machine from the mid 70s onwards. It's amazing after finally seeing this film at just how many later productions followed the template set down by Hu's operatic and musically fascinating picture.

Cheng Pei Pei exudes lots of fortuitous sexuality as Golden Swallow. Her curvaceous features shine through in nearly every scene she occupies. Her movements in the fight scenes are beautiful to watch and unlike a fair number of other female performers in fighting roles, Cheng Pei-peï did her own fight scenes and looked good doing them. A large part of this is no doubt due to her career as a dancer. Also her eagerness and enthusiasm helped make her roles a success. Her first altercation inside the inn is a memorable one as she has a run in with members of the villainous gang who have kidnapped her brother. Each member reverently tests her skills and she returns the gesture in kind letting them know that she could easily cut them down should she so desire. The fight inside the

temple is although noteworthy wherein Golden Swallow finds the antagonists are lying in wait for her there. Cheng returned for the sequel two years later in *GOLDEN SWALLOW* (1968). Ironically, her character isn't the main focal point of that movie. Despite the title, it was a choice on the part of director Chang Cheh. Both films couldn't be more different but are classics for totally different reasons. Here, Cheng Pei-pei's character is part of a love triangle involving Silver Roc (Jimmy Wang Yu) and Golden Whip (Lo Lieh). The title might be at first misleading, but Golden Swallow is the center by which the other protagonists revolve. Golden Whip is in love with her and she is in love with vengeance fueled Silver Roc. He goes on a killing spree annihilating any and all brigands in an attempt to kill two birds with one stone; by leaving Golden Swallows calling card at the scene of the massacres in the hopes of drawing her out to him. Cheng Pei-pei was notably unhappy doing this movie as Chang Cheh was hesitant to let her participate in what little action there was for her yet her time on *COME DRINK WITH ME* (1966) was a much more pleasant experience for the inspired and vigorous actress.

Yueh Hua lights up the screen as Drunken Cat, a mysterious beggar character who has an agenda of his own. It is he who makes up the bulk of the film's second half. According to Yueh Hua, King Hu was somewhat disenchanted with him playing the kung fu beggar and wanted an older actor but at the behest of Sir Run Run Shaw, Hua got the part. Supposedly, this is the reason Hu left Shaw Brothers as he did not have the free reign nor the amount of time he would have liked to make his films. According to Chang Cheh, this is true. The latter half of the film involving Drunken Cat and his fateful duel with the evil monk where both utilize their magic kung fu seems out of place with everything that came before it. There is mention that possibly the Shaw's were despondent over the film and ordered changes resulting in the melding of swordplay and fantasy elements. While it is a bit jarring, you could think of it as two supreme martial artists who have reached the zenith of their skills as both vie for the symbol that will make the winner the head master of their clan.

It was also nice to see Chen Hung Lieh in such an early role cast as a heartless villain and sporting a death-like complexion upon his face and neck. His character is thoroughly summed up after he blinds a mischievous little boy monk with his poisonous darts just before ordering one of his subordinates to "help him". Ku Feng is also seen a few times and Chao Hsiung gets to show off his scowl and skills in most of the action scenes. He was featured in supporting roles as major bad guys during the late 60s through the mid 70s and got a shot at a lead twice as a hero but he unfortunately, never quite caught on with audiences.

Location shots mix with some gorgeous Shaw sets from the always reliable Johnson Tsao. His stunningly ornate sets are well served by Japanese cinematographer Tadashi Nishimoto (He Lan Sheng). Numerous set ups reveal an attention to detail as well as another layer of ingenuity such as the many panning shots during the sword fights and a nice reverse panning shot as the camera pulls back from the outside of the temple revealing the bad guys closing the doors as the camera continues to pass and we see them locking Golden Swallow inside shortly before they attack her.

The new Dragon Dynasty DVD is stunning and contains an audio commentary with Bey Logan and Cheng Pei-pei, photo gallery and interviews with Cheng Pei-pei, Yueh Hua, Tsui Hark and Bey Logan. The interviews range from 13 to 17 minutes a piece and divulge a lot of information as well as numerous behind the scenes shots.

I wouldn't say this was a favorite Shaw Brothers film, but it definitely deserves its classic status and should be seen by all fans of the genre to view the beginnings of great things to come. Not just in the swordplay genre, but the martial arts genre as a whole as others would make an even bigger splash (such as Chang Cheh). But had not King Hu directed *COME DRINK WITH ME* (1966), than it's possible the martial arts film landscape would be a completely different place as we know it today.

**Comet Strikes, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Lo Wei)** - Lo Wei clearly had it in him to become a horror director as by this and even darker moments in *The Big Boss* were rich on atmosphere. While not paid off very clearly, *The Comet Strikes* has an admirable buildup and aura of mystery surrounding a possibly haunted mansion and mixing Wuxia pian tactics with grounded sword brawls (Nora Miao is impressively physical) makes it a very interesting if not totally fulfilling watch. Also with Patrick Tse, Lo Wei, Sek Kin and Lee Kwan.

**Conspiracy of Thieves (Hong Kong, 1975: Larry Tu)** - There are a whole bunch of classic movies, especially those from the Shaw Brothers, that I haven't seen yet, but I'm always poking my head around obscure and forgotten corners hoping to happen upon a gem that hasn't been discovered yet, or whose brilliant luster has been lost to the

generations. With Tan Tao-Liang's third film, *Conspiracy of Thieves*, I have found such a movie. It is the *Casino Royale* of kung fu movies, and I mean that in the most flattering way.

We open with the arrival in town by a rather poor-looking creature named Chu (Tan Tao-Liang), who appears to have some kung fu skills, given that he got a ride on a carriage by kicking its former occupant, Mr. Wong (Sun Yueh), into the mud. He's dismissed by the inn owner/prostitute/madame of the local restaurant (Betty Pei Ti, not to be confused with Betty Ting Pei) until he shows her how much money he has on him. She helps him rent a nice Western suit—this film is set during the Republic Era, much like Tan's first two films—after which he heads over to the local casino to test his luck.

At the casino, Chu asks to see the boss, claiming that he wants to play the big games for very high stakes. Assuming that he's just looking for trouble, the casino workers take him into the courtyard and fight him, and we see that he really does know his kung fu. The fight is interrupted by the arrival of the owner (Tan Tao-Kang, who I assume is Tan's brother in real life) who asks him what he wants. Chu tells him that he's not rich and would like to bet his own life at the tables. The owner tells him that such a proposal isn't worth it and offers him 100 dollars to take a hike. Chu insists and the owner relents, giving him 50 dollars as starting money.

Lo and behold, Chu is actually a pretty good gambler. In the course of a few hours, Chu has multiplied his winnings to the point where the house now owes him 12,000 dollars! Cue the arrival of Mr. Wong, the same gentleman who had been humiliated before. The tension rises as the stakes rise, with the final game being played for Mr. Chu's life, or the entire casino. That's where we start to learn more about the characters and their motivations.

This is one of the few kung fu movies where I actually really care about the story developments and what happens next, instead of waiting impatiently for the next fight scene. Director Larry Tu, a former assistant of the great King Hu, is smart enough to keep us interested by revealing the characters' backgrounds and motivations gradually, keeping our interest through some sleight-of-hand gambling tricks (which *Mahjong Dragon* was missing) and the suspense of if Chu would lose and then how would the casino owner would react if he lost everything. The story structure, with most of the first half taking place at the gambling tables, reminded me of *Casino Royale*, albeit with a kung fu bent to it.

There aren't a whole lot of fight scenes in the movie, but because I'm invested in the characters when the action picks up in the last third, it has a lot more impact to it. Also, this is probably one of Tan Tao-Liang's best martial arts performances, period. The action, choreographed by Tan himself and Wong Yeuk-Ping (who did some assistant directing in the Tan Tao-Liang film *Snake-Crane Secret* and shows up the first casino employee to play against Chu), maintains a high standard throughout, even when Tan isn't fighting. Tan gets to use all of his kicks: side kicks, front kicks, roundhouse kicks, spin kicks, jumping spin kicks, jumping side kicks, hop kicks, and a few other aerial kicks that I've only seen Tan use in John Woo's *Hand of Death*. Tan's handwork is pretty simple, but still executed with strength and crispness, so that you know that it's hurting his opponents. His brother Tan Tao-Kang uses an Eagle Claw-esque hand technique, a good foil to Tan's legwork, and is assisted in action by Cliff Ching, who'd play the main villain in *Fighting Ace*, starring Tan Tao-Liang's student, John Liu.

In the end, this is an unsung classic that deserves to be known by more people. Highly recommended.

**Crane Fighter, The (Taiwan, 1979: Raymond Lui) - Aka The Crane Fighters, Champ of Champs** - After Angela Mao and Polly Shang Kuan Ling Feng, the third member of the Trifecta of Female Old School Chopsockey Excellence was Chia Ling. Much like Angela Mao, Chia Ling trained in the Peking Opera and was well-renown on stage before receiving the invitation to act in films. Chia Ling occupied the middle ground between Angela's intense persona and Polly's fun-loving tomboy. Chia Ling was endowed with a heaping of charisma and a winning smile which usually overshadowed her intensity in the kung fu arena. Even when she was hell-bent on revenge, you couldn't help but want to be close to her. Moreover, Chia was an excellent fighter and was capable of performing numerous styles in front of the camera, including drunken boxing—one of the only women to actually perform that style onscreen. But what really made Chia Ling stand out was her work ethic. From the interviews we've seen of her, she put her heart and soul into whatever was given to her. In her case, it just happened to be making martial arts movies. You admire her skills and know that she would be successful in any area she might have chosen for a career, because she's willing to work hard for it. *The Crane Fighters* in many ways is the culmination of the woman's talents and efforts.

The movie begins the way numerous films made since 1974 have: a contingent of Qing soldiers led by the Governor of Canton (Kam Kong of *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*) attacking a group of laymen who survived the burning of the Shaolin Temple. After a bloody fight, only one Ming Patriot remains: Yang Su (*Invincible Armour's* Chuen Yuen). Yang Su goes into hiding and becomes a bean curd seller, along with his daughter, Ping'er (Chia Ling, *Against the Drunken Cat's Paws* and *Queen Boxer*). Ping'er is forbidden to learn martial arts, but she learns it anyway, namely

the Crane Style of kung fu. After becoming a proficient martial artist, she teaches the art to her father's assistant, Shao Wei (Ting Wa-Chung of *Heroes of Shaolin* and *Peculiar Boxing Tricks and the Master*), as well.

Of course, being a kung fu movie, her skills are bound to come out in the open sooner or later. That happens when a corrupt monk shows up at the door of some nobleman's house and starts banging an annoying drum, demanding a donation of 100 taels. Shao Wei shows up and picks a fight with the monk, with Ping'er joining in on the fun of humiliating the charlatan. Yang Su is rather upset with his daughter for studying the martial arts against his wishes, but the sudden appearance of an old Shaolin brother stops him from beating her to death for disobedience. Lucky her.

We're then treated to another comic interlude (and genre cliché) in which a trio of lowlifes at a restaurant forces a poor singer and her father to sing lewd music for their pleasure. Ping'er arrives at the restaurant and challenges the men, but then a stranger (Raymond Lui, the film's director) makes an appearance and beats the men to a pulp and forces them to sing like girls. He and Ping'er exchange lovey-dovey glances, but nothing really comes of this meeting.

Meanwhile, the humiliated monk from two paragraphs up complains to the village chief's second-in-command, who sends the chief's insane, hunchbacked son to teach Ping'er a lesson. The two fight until Yang Su interrupts, at which point the chief's Yes Man says that Ping'er has to marry the crippled nutcase or the family will be thrown in jail. Of course, marrying the handicapped whackjob isn't a very good option, so Yang Su contracts a matchmaker to find a husband for Ping'er. The best the matchmaker can come up with is a lazy opium smoker, whom Ping'er scares off by dressing like a prostitute ("She looks like the women you visit at the whorehouse, dad!"). At Shao Wei's insistence, Yang Su sets up a martial arts tournament: whomever can defeat Ping'er can marry her.

With the help of the stranger from the restaurant, Ping'er is able to defeat the village chief's son—she even goes so far as to blind him! She does, however, lose in battle to the stranger, although he turns down the invitation to marry her. When the village chief finds out, he complains to the Governor of Canton, who's in town. Well, the gig is up for Yang Su and soon both him and his brother are thrown into prison by Governor's men. Yang Su is rescued from prison by Shao Wei, Ping'er, and the stranger and soon the three go into hiding once more. During this time, love blooms between Ping'er and the stranger and it doesn't take long before the two are married. However, it's only a matter of time before the Qing soldiers find them again...

There's not lot here that hasn't been many times before or after, so if you're a jaded viewer watching this, you may think that writer/director Raymond Lui is just marking a checklist as he goes along. Let's see, film that revolves around the survivors of the burning of the Shaolin Temple? That's been done since the 1974 film *Five Shaolin Masters*. Villains who have mastered the Iron Vest technique? That also goes back to a 1974 Chang Cheh film, although in this case, it's *Shaolin Martial Arts*. Protagonist who learns kung fu against his/her father's wishes? Check. Protagonist's comic relief friend? Check. Rich jerk who terrorizes a poor girl and gets his just desserts? Check. Comedy involving undesirable suitor? Check. Martial arts tournament for a girl's hand in marriage? Check. Heck, this film even has the moxy to rip off *Executioners from Shaolin's* "husband-can't-bed-his-wife-until-he-breaks-her-horse-stance" sequence—you know, that sounds really inappropriate when you think about it.

So what saves this movie from being a boring retread of familiar material? It's Chia Ling's performance and the copious fight scenes that fill the film, obviously. Chia Ling, even more than Angela Mao, feels like the template on which Michelle Yeoh built her characters from *Wing Chun* and *Silver Hawk*. Chia Ling's character is not only a talented martial artist, but she genuinely enjoys getting into fights and showing off her skills. Moreover, Chia Ling has that slightly amused smile—you know, the one that says "I can beat you up without batting an eyelash but you're fun to watch anyway"—down pat. Once the action gets started around the 30-minute mark, practically all of the fight scenes belong to her, which is greatly appreciated.

The action duties were handled by writer/director/actor Raymond Lui, in conjunction with Taiwanese choreographer So Kwok-Leung. Lui's choreographer credits include three films that he himself directed, while the latter choreographed a number of slightly well-known chopsockeys, including the Public Domain (re: readily available) *Chase Step by Step* and another Crane Style film, *One-Foot Crane*. Most of the action is hand-to-hand, although some of the big group dust-ups feature limited weapons fighting. The titular "Crane Fighters" are Chia Ling and Ting Wa-Chung, while Raymond Lui and Kam Kong use more varied Shaolin animal techniques. Kudos to both action directors for allowing Kam Kong to be lively in his fighting, instead of having him stand still for the greater part of the battle while the good guys fruitlessly try to find his weak spot. Their choreography is a rung below what Sammo Hung and Lau Kar-Leung were doing at the same time, but it looks technically correct for the most part and never feels too slow. The only real creative touch to the action is the hunchback character, who has a technique in which he lies on his back and mercilessly kicks at his opponent. And thank goodness, despite this being a Raymond Lui film on nearly all fronts, he never forgets that it's all about Chia Ling and gives her the most action.

**Crazy Acrobat (Taiwan, 1974: Yang Ching-Chen)** - Crazy Acrobat is a low budget Taiwan remake of Back Alley Princes, but with Chia Ling and Barry Chan in the lead roles, and with much more action and slapstick than Back Alley Princes had. Just as BAP was a superb vehicle for Polly Kuan, so this film gives Chia Ling one of her best roles. However when Polly was sold to the brothel in BAP, she acted shy and innocent; but when Chia Ling is sold to the brothel here, she behaves like a saucy tease, who is going to have a wonderful time. All her fight scenes are similar to her fights in Female Chivalry: playful and fun-loving, even when outnumbered. The film has two drawbacks: some silly wire work, and the main villain is defeated off-camera. Still, if you like Chia Ling, you'll definitely want to see this film.

**Crazy Guy with Super Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1978: Wong Fei-Lung)** - A bad kung fu-comedy starring Lee I Min, Sun Jung Chi, Cheng Fu Hung, and Peng Kang. The comedy mostly fails, although there are a few moments during the fights that are pretty funny. Also included is the far too oft-seen quasi-homosexual kung fu guy. The story is about what you would expect from a movie like this.. The fighting is the only thing that makes this movie worth watching, with some decent shapes action that is not near the potential of the crew. (Mentioned above, and Peng Kang also serves as action director.) The fight's are decent and often, so the poor comedy and story aren't too terrible to sit through. The finale was okay with Lee I Min, Sun Jung Chi, and Peng Kang showing off their acrobatic/shapes skills as expected, and Cheng Fu Hung has some funny moments.

Overall the movie was bad enough that I can't see watching it again, but not so bad that I regret spending the time to watch it. Having a couple fairly talented screen fighters and a couple sort of funny moments save it from being complete crap. Cool seeing the reliable Sun Chung Chi as a good guy, but he was underused.

**Crazy Horse, Intelligent Monkey (Hong Kong, 1982: Tony Liu, Chan Hei)** - Chi Kuan Chun plays a man who is in search of his mother, who has mysteriously gone missing after visiting her brother. After inadvertently saving a homeless man (Hon Gwok Choi) who was caught cheating while gambling, the man hears of Chi's strife and wishes to aid him. While on the path to Chi's uncles house, they are saved by a mysterious man (Candy Wen in bad disguise) more than once. Upon arriving at his Uncle's house, Chi begins to see things are not as they seem, as his uncle is acting strange, and he is still being shadowed by Candy Wen-man..

The story and acting are actually pretty decent. Chi Kuan Chun, Jue Tit-Who, and Candy Wen are all solid actors for the genre. At the end of the day, the story is more revenge-fu fair, but a couple fairly predictable twists make it somewhat interesting. If you enjoy Hon Gwok Choi's typical schtick, you will enjoy it again here, I did.

I wont waste too much time on that stuff. On to the action. I am not familiar with 2 of the 3 action directors here, but anytime I see Alan Chui on that list, I expect good fights.

Most of the action in the first half of the movie is a combination of Hung Gar, various animal styles, and some Wing Chun I believe. There is also some very nice weapons work mixed in. You can see bits of Snake, Mantis, Tiger, and Crane throughout the movie from various different characters, but they are mixed in with other styles, so there isn't much to speak of. Chiang Kam and Wang Kuang-Yu do have a part where they use "**Tiger**" and "**Crane**" exclusively, but it is brief, slow, and neither is a great example of the styles used. Kwan Hoi San (I think?) uses some very nice **Mantis** style in the few brief exchanges he gets, using the mantis fist in fast flurries, and for arm locks, which to my knowledge is what it was intended for. During the finale we get to see more pronounced animal styles, even if one is fictitious. I'll start with Hon Gwok Choi's **Monkey** style.. Hon Gwok Choi was pretty good at erratic, slapstick movements, as well as being pretty flexible and acrobatic. So it is no surprise he pulls off the monkey style quite well, although more so in terms of comedy than action. Chi Kuan Chun's **Horse** style is basically a drunken Panther style. Take the panther's hand form and strikes, use the erratic movements of the drunken style, add in a vicious yet comical "Horse buck kick", and that sums up the Horse style. It is pretty entertaining, as just about any fight involving KKC is. When they "combine" their styles, it is very fun to watch as CKC tosses and flips Hon Gwok Choi into or away from their opponent while fighting.

The rest of the characters in the film seem to be using a constantly changing and mixed style (or no style?), so I'll just call that "Shapes", haha. With that said Jue Tit-Woh puts on a good performance, and to my surprise shows some pretty clean, and powerful kicks at times. Lau Hok-Nin is very good, especially in a quick weapons duel with Chi Kuan Chun, and Candy Wen puts on a great fighting performance, although she is strangely doubled for some unnecessary acrobatics. I say strangely, because she was rather flexible and athletic herself, so her doubling took away from what could have been more of a good fighting performance from her to me.

Overall a pretty solid independent kung fu flick, with a decent story and acting, that is filled with good and varied fights; Courtesy of a solid cast and crew. I am a little puzzled on how to grade this as far as our theme goes. On one hand, Animal styles are used at least a little all the way throughout the movie, on the other, the only two that are evident and featured prominently are in the last 15 to 30 minutes. Either way, it was a very fun film to watch, and I recommend it to fans of anyone involved.

**Crazy Shaolin Disciples (Hong Kong, 1985: Yao Ka-Hung)** - When I first watched it years ago, I wasn't familiar at all with all the famous figures from Shaolin, nor with Mandarin language as yet, and I took it as a funny kung fu comedy. But now, I realized that it actually talks about Hong Xi Guan, Fang Shi Yu and Hu Hui Qian and, though the movie was more treated as a comedy, it shows a serious subject with a Qing officer chasing Hong Xi Guan, in order to destroy him and his clan because they struggle to restore the Mings. The furious ending fight between Lo Lieh, Liu Chia Hui, Chin Siu Ho and Wong Yue is excellent.

I know that there many people here who don't appreciate Wong Yue, but maybe it's because the directors who chose him as the hero didn't give him a chance to show his talent as he was only casted as an annoying and arrogant guy (exactly what happened to Marilyn Monroe who was only chosen to show a kind of stupid girl existing to only tease men in almost all her movies and who sadly died when she was acting in a more serious movie, if I remember well)...

Fu Sheng's Fang Shi Yu was more convincing, but had the same humoristic and arrogant spirit, at least in the beginning of the movies in which he played this role, before the serious stories and fights take place, if I remember well.

**Crippled Avengers, The (Hong Kong, 1978: Chang Cheh)** - aka **Mortal Combat, Return of the Five Deadly Venoms** - *The Crippled Avengers* is one of those fan favorites that people tend to rank as one of their favorite Shaw Brothers films, or favorite Venom Mob film, or favorite classic kung fu film, or whatever. I had the chance to see this film many years ago back when Blockbuster was only stocking VHS. I had rented both *The Master Killer* (1978) and *Five Deadly Venoms* (1978) in the summer of 1999 and had found both of them rather overrated. So I wasn't all that excited to see another Venom Mob film until 2006 when I started working on some projects regarding kung fu movies. Now I tend to think that the Venom Mob films represent some of the best of the Shaw Brothers output, all things considered.

In this movie, three men storm the manor of a local warlord (Chen Kuan Tai, *Iron Monkey* and *Dragon Tiger Gate*), whom they think is too arrogant and needs some to be humbled. Not finding him there, they take his wife and son and proceed to cut off her legs and his arms. The wife dies and the son (who'll be played by Lu Feng as an adult) is eventually given prosthetic arms made of steel. Him and his dad also become tyrannical kung fu wackos as the years pass. One day, a local blacksmith (Lo Meng) starts mouthing off to the two at a restaurant. When an outsider (Philip Kwok) agrees out loud to the blacksmith's insults, the son pokes his eyes out. The blacksmith is then taken by the warlord's men and forced to drink a draught that makes him mute...and then has his ears boxed in a way that leaves him deaf. Another poor shmuck (Sun Chien) bumps into the son on the street and gets his legs cut off. Finally, a would-be knight errant (Chiang Shang) tries to stop the warlord and his son, only get captured and turned into an imbecile after a metal ring of sorts is placed on his hand and tightened. All that in the first 25 minutes of the film.

The next 25 minutes follow our four cripples who are able to find the master of Chiang Shang. The master agrees to teach them kung fu, and in three years, they all become capable of dishing out the kung fu goodness...even Sun Chien, who gets prosthetic legs made of iron made for him. After their training is over, the rest of the film is dedicated to their attempts to avenge the wrongs committed against them and beat the living tar out of the warlord and his army of lackeys.

This is a violent and occasionally sadistic film, although it does not dwell on the gore like I thought it was going to when I sat down to watch it. There are lots of maiming and mutilation going on. There are some moments that I don't know if they are supposed to be harrowing or blackly funny. On his birthday, the son is given the present of being able to maim and cripple the sons of the men who had cut off his arms. My favorite moment of dark humor is when Philip Kwok and Lo Meng are taking on a big strong guy (the master of the ball-shot technique, if I remember correctly...heh) who take their blows without flinching. Sun Chien then appears and asks if he could have a shot. Chiang Shang warns the man that Sun Chien has "iron feet". Thinking that "iron feet" is the name for some fancy technique, the man relents. Sun Chien proceeds to kick a hole in the guy's stomach, much to the man's dismay.

There are some great action moments brought to you by choreographer Robert Tai, who was assisted by Lu Feng and Chiang Sheng. The first notable fight is the one between Chiang Sheng, who's armed with a sword, and Johnny

Wang Lung-Wei, who's armed with a meteor hammer (i.e. ball and chain). There are some interesting fights involving two villains who fight with flashy kicks, daggers, and bow that shoots iron balls. The final fight is a masterpiece of acrobatics, with Philip Kwok and Chiang Sheng performing some crazed gymnastics using a metal ring.

I really enjoyed this movie. There are some good training scenes. The fights scenes are pretty exciting for the most part. Each of the Venoms does a good job with his role. My only complaint is that Sun Chien is given the shaft and gets little opportunity to show off his skills. I think that is my major complaint about any Venom Mob film: they waste Sun Chien, who is as good an actor as he is a kicker.

**Crippled Masters, The (Taiwan, 1984: Joe Law)** - I'm sure there are many who could argue that, really, this is a story about empowerment and overcoming obstacles, about perseverance in the face of adversity, taking arms against a sea of troubles, etc. There may even be those mouthing the sentiments above who actually believe those words as they fall trippingly from the tongue. All right, I'll knock off the Hamlet allusions. After all, there are people who believe any danged idea.

I'd like for them to be right, actually. Because it sets my PC-O-Meter clanging and sproinging any time I admit to myself that this feels like a good ol'-fashioned kung fu freak show here.

Most action movies try to start with a bang; this one starts with a thud -- specifically that of a severed limb hitting the ground. The victim is Li Ho (Frankie Shum, presumably -- credits are never too specific on kung fu imports), and the second arm soon joins the first in the dust. "Why," you ask? Because the actor has no arms, and they needed to get them out of the way early on. Oh, you meant, "Why was the character divested of his arms in terms of story?" Got me there, really. Up until now, he's been in the pay of moustachioed warlord Ling, whose paranoia about his employees is only matched by the bizarre scar-like thing on his left cheek that changes shape every danged scene. (Seriously, folks, high on the list of things to watch out for in potential employers is "Facial Blemishes Which Exhibit a Life of Their Own.") The lackey calmly overseeing the disarming (hah!), Kung (Jack Conn), just gives the reason as "Orders," with a blasé attitude that suggests to me that goings-on of this ilk are scarcely unheard of around chez Ling. (Maybe this is what he meant when he promised them a retirement plan so rich, "they'd never have to lift a finger." Boy, I'm just cranking 'em out tonight. Next!)

They toss Li Ho out on his keister, where he promptly bleeds to death. No! That would be too depressingly realistic. Instead, in this alternate version of human anatomy, having two arms severed leaves one only with blood-spattered nubs -- or in this case, one nub and one four-inch arm stump with an odd two-fingered proto-hand on it. Aside from some fatigue from his beating, and the fact that he's missing fully half of his limbs, Li Ho, isn't much the worse for wear.

Even so, though, historical China isn't an easy place to get along without any arms. He wandered into a nearby restaurant for some chicken, but customers start streaming out of the place, and the maitre d' gets his jollies dangling the chicken leg like a cat toy, before finally siccing the bouncer on him. (Chicken joints got bouncers in China? Must be a helluva lunch special they got going on.) Thrill to the smug look on the chubby bouncer's face; this is indeed a man who derives much self-value from beating up armless beggars.

He wakes up from his beating in the workshop of the town coffin-maker, who clues him in on the fact that his former employer isn't quite the saint-in-training that his press agent makes him out to be. For one thing, Ling orders coffins by the gross, and he doesn't appear to be in the hospital or spook-alley business. The coffin-maker's quite willing to nurse Li Ho back to health, but right then some of Ling's goons show up for the day's coffin shipment, and decide to take another few shots at Li Ho.

He ends up stumbling through the countryside, trying to get sips of water from rivers that end up knocking him downstream and washing the fake blood off his stumps. Eventually he hits the low when he shoos pigs from their trough just to get a mouthful of slops, and the kindly farmer takes him in. Not as a service project, mind you; as a farm hand. Now get to work!

And work he does. Without that tacky fake blood getting in the way, he manages to put his pseudo-arm to good use, along with his feet, his chin, and whatever else he can move. Eventually he's watering crops, grinding wheat, and playing Blind Man's Buff with the neighborhood kids.

But Ling is still a paranoid creep, and so he gives a similar treatment to his henchman lackey, Kung. (Reason? "He knows too much." Given the general ignorance of his other goons, I can see why Kung might stand out.) Not the arms this time, though; instead, he has Kung held down and pours a thimbleful of acid on Kung's legs, which

dissolves the muscles right through the skin, leaving him a paraplegic with floppy, useless lower extremities. And then out the door with him.

And so... aw, you're way ahead of me. What are the odds that Kung, in crawling off to find shelter by the river, should run directly into Li Ho? Yep, and since Li Ho's at least got the use of his legs, he uses them to kick Kung's ass all over the place for having his arms chopped off. (Right here, in my notes, is a single line: "Better than Bumfights!" I'm not proud of it, but there it is.) And the only thing that stops Li Ho from killing Kung outright is... an old man in a basket.

No, really. There's an old yogi folded up in a covered basket who stops Li Ho from taking his revenge, and suggests that the two of them work together to pay back Ling. And since the old man also happens to be a kung fu master, he's just the man to teach them. Before long, Li Ho can twirl a staff with his stump and throw rocks with his toes. Kung can walk on his hands (with his useless legs folded up beneath him) and do kung fu from the ground. They're so confident in their new abilities, that they decide, "Hm, time for some chicken." They go back to that very same restaurant and beat the crud out of the maitre d', the bouncer, and anyone else who wanders too close. (Looks like somebody saw Superman 2 and liked it.)

Not that they did it all on their own, though. There's another guy at the bar, dressed in white, who gets in a few licks. He comes across as something of a playboy bon vivant, although that impression may be fostered by the fact that I've been staring at a steady stream of crippled and limbless beggars, fat old men, skinny old men, and a melanoma the size of Cleveland; an able-bodied, surefooted young man is liable to wind up looking like a Greek god in that line-up.

I'm getting bogged down in my own cleverness here (I think I want that on my tombstone), so let's fast-forward a bit. Ling hires the man in white to fight the cripples once he hears of their skill. The cripples, meanwhile, are being sent by their master into Ling's place to retrieve the Eight Jade Horses, a meaningless McGuffin that Ling once stole from the master. But the man in white lets them go, since he's actually a government agent supposed to spy on Ling. Then Ling has the snot beaten out of the man in white, and he's rescued by the master and the two cripples. Then Ling sneaks up and singlehandedly defeats the master while no one's looking, so finally Li Ho, Kung, and the man in white go back to confront him and mend his evil ways. The man in white occupies himself with beating up the comic relief, leaving Li Ho and Kung to take on Ling. But since they learned the kung fu secret of the Eight Jade Paperweights (which is basically that Kung rides on Li Ho's back), they finally manage to beat Ling to death. The end.

What notoriety this movie has is entirely from the fact that, yes, Frankie Shum has no arms and Jack Conn has no use of his legs. Oh, and they know kung fu. Be that as it may, it's pretty apparent that things had to be awfully carefully choreographed so that the two stars didn't end up getting hurt too badly. I'm sure they trained well, and they look great in exhibition and all, but there are certain physical realities that just won't go away. One of Li Ho's main fighting techniques involves using his little proto-hand for blocking and pinning, as well as for striking. Uh-huh. Try to knock someone down using just a flick of your wrist. Works well, doesn't it? And Kung continually has to walk on his hands, sit, throw a few punches, walk on his hands... It's only slightly more believable than, say, Vanilla Ice throwing around his Vanilla Fu in Cool as Ice.

The biggest mystery for me, though, is Ling. No, not the Facial Growth That Conquered The World, I'm talking about his back. He's got a pillow-like hump that, whenever struck in the course of a kung fu bout, makes a dull clang like metal. Yet, despite my expectations, the climax did not involve tearing off the back of his shirt and exposing whatever it was in there. And maybe then selling it on eBay.

The movie's got novelty going for it, sure, but once the fascination of watching Frankie Shum's little proto-hand wears off, the bloom's off the rose.

**Crush, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Tu Kuang-Chi)** - Pai Piao plays a Chinese who comes to Seoul in order to find an old friend. There, he witnesses how the Japanese men under Chen Hung Lieh's orders mistreat the Korean people of a Taekwondo school and also the people of the town. He decides to help them and when they see that he is more powerful than them, the Japanese decide to ask him to join them. As he accepts the rendezvous with Chen Hung Lieh (but not to join him, he just wants to tell him to stop to bully the villagers and the school of Taekwondo), the students of the Taekwondo believe that he is a traitor and they don't want him as a friend anymore. Finally, the misunderstanding is cleared up and they all join forces to get rid of the Japanese after these ones killed some students of the school. That's a superb non stop action movie and Pai Piao is great in this role. I give this movie a 10/10



**Crystal Fist (Hong Kong, 1979: Hua Shan) - Aka Jade Claw** - So according to Clive Gentry III in [Jackie Chan: Inside the Dragon](#), this film stands as the best film to use the so-called Seasonal Formula, even surpassing the two films that inspired it: *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *The Drunken Master*. Having watched as much of these films as I have, I can only state here that I think said remark is a bunch of poppycock. Perhaps I've simply seen too many kung fu comedies, and thus a movie \*really\* has to Wow me to get my attention, but despite some good fights in the last 20 minutes or so, I didn't find this film much to write home about.

We open with a kung fu fighter (Hau Chiu-Sing, *Stroke of Death*) getting ambushed by three other fighters, including a deaf boxer (Brandy Yuen of the Yuen Clan) and a bline one (Addy Sung, who helped choreography Chong's *Kung Fu From Beyond the Grave*). They're led by Master Yen (Chu Tit-Wo, Cheung Man's father in *Last Hero in China*), and they have a bone to pick with their victim. Apparently, the guy they're triple teaming, along with his master, fought the three and were the ones responsible for the two crippled guys' afflictions. Well, Hau Chiu-Sing's character is murdered, and he leaves behind an orphan son, Ah Wen, who'll grow up to be Indonesian martial artist Billy Chong.

Ah Wen shows up one day at a martial arts school, looking for work. He initially tries to fake his way into a job as an assistant instructor, but the other two assistants (Dean Shek look-alike David Wu Dai-Wai and the rotund) Lun Ga-Chun call his bluff and get him beat up. The master, however, takes pity on him and is willing to give him room and board and lessons, if he agrees to do all the menial tasks at the school, including assisting the school's cook (Simon Yuen). Sounds similar to Chin Fu from *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, doesn't it?

The relationship between Ah Wen and the cook is initially antagonistic (sound like *Drunken Master* to you?), but the two begin to warm up to each other. Ah Wen discovers that the cook is actually a master of the Eagle's Claw and tricks the cook into teaching him kung fu. Things are going well at first, until some random fight with a Russian boxer (Alexander, who played James Bond in *Dragon Lives Again*) catches the attention of Master Yen (see SITES). Yen and his entourage ambush him and thoroughly humiliate him (see DM), causing him to go back to his master in shame. The cook teaches him a second style, as only the Eagle claw style isn't enough for Master Yen's Double Phoenix technique (see SITES, where the Snake Fist isn't enough for the Eagle's Claw, but needs to be complimented by the Cat's Claw). Now Ah Wen is ready for revenge, plus he can get win back his boss's school in the process—it's since been taken over by the blind and deaf masters.

As one might expect, there's not much original in this film and it follows all the expected beats of its predecessors to a T. That alone is enough to put this below Jackie Chan's Seasonal Films in terms of quality, Billy Chong's fighting skills notwithstanding. If we look at the better examples of the post-*Drunken Master* kung fu comedies, like *Daggers 8* and *Hell's Wind Staff*, those all had a little something to set them apart. Moreover, those films also had the good sense to spread the fight action evenly among their 90-minute run-times, as opposed to this one, where it doesn't get real until the last 20 minutes. When I saw *Daggers 8* back in 2010, I think it officially marked the moment that I got tired of these late 70s/early 80s kung fu comedies. But now, after watching sub-par movies like this and *Drunken Master*, *Slippery Snake*, I appreciate it a lot more.

The action is pretty good, although only the last three fights or so are really worth it. It's basically a reunion of the action directors from *Hell's Wind Staff*, so you can trust that it will be of fairly high quality. However, lead villain Chu Tit-Wo is really no Hwang Jang Lee, which dampens some of my enthusiasm for the final fight. And if it that weren't enough, some the action, especially when Billy Chong takes on Addy Sung and Brandy Yuen before the climax, is too undercranked. What I liked most about the action is that the action directors, principally those of the Yuen Clan, were more well-versed in Northern styles, so the Eagle Claw on display is more authentic Ying Jao Pai than the Southern Eagle Claw that we get in a lot of these movies. Generally speaking, Northern Eagle Claw uses all five fingers, whereas the Southern variations, which show up in Taiwanese styles and whatnot, use a three-fingered claw. So I liked that particular detail.

I know this film has a positive reputation among fans, but it just didn't do it for me. Maybe if I had seen it 15 years earlier, I'd appreciate it more. But these days, these Seasonal Film rip-offs really need to surprise to get a positive reaction from me, and this one brought no surprises whatsoever to the table.

**Cub Tiger From Kwangtung, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Ngai Hoi Fung)** - Also known as Master With Cracked Fingers, which was the title given to this early Jackie Chan vehicle when re-edited in 1979. This is the original widescreen, Mandarin language version that differs, story wise, from the re-release version. That re-edit was made after Jackie's breakthrough in the late 70s and clearly took its cues from *Drunken Master* (with Simon Yuen, in newly shot footage, reprising his famous role) That story element isn't found in the original version and the flashback that opens the film then paves way for the plot where Jackie's character clashes with a group of local thugs. It's still a terribly boring martial arts movie but it has to be said that there's split seconds here and there of that JC creativity on display that would later bloom in the 80s. Despite that, basically every fight is a snooze fest and in particular the long finale is stiff fight choreography at its best. Yuen Biao is visible in this edit of the movie and is possibly doubling Jackie at certain points during the end fight. The Japanese DVD houses the original theatrical print with subtitles that

frequently drops below frame and are hard to read even when they ARE in frame. Not that the plot is that hard to follow.

**Damned, The (Taiwan, 1977: Kao Pao-Shu) – aka Battle of Shaolin; Bandits, Prostitutes and Silver; Wu Tang Ho's, Thugs and Scyllah** - The story is very good, Chang Le (Don Wong) is a poor carriage driver who is trying to raise money to buy his lover from a brothel. He also takes care of a poor, young bastard boy, basically, he's a very good guy. His character endures a lot of crap, he has vowed to his lover not to fight, and is bullied by the lackeys of those running the town, the brothel owner (who owns his lover), etc... Basically, his life sucks. An infamous bandit by the name of Sparrow (Man Kong Lung) shows up in town, and is impressed by Don Wong's whipping/fighting skill, and seeks his aid in raiding an escort with a busload of silver.. Though a righteous man, desperate times call for desperate measures, so Don Wong decides to tag along. Angela Mao who is the leader (along with Phillip Ko) of the "3 Scars Gang" bandit crew(who never kill!), is also looking to obtain this silver.. She reluctantly seeks the aid of local, and ruthless big boss who basically runs the town, Lo Lieh, and his gang/resources....Who will get the silver, what allegiances will endure, and will Don Wong free his lover from the reigns of the brothel?

The plot is good, plays out well, and is full of great characters with different personalities and ideals.. A very impressive display of plot/acting for an independent flick. It is a pretty dark story overall, but the little boy brings some charm to it.. On top of that, the little boy also does one of the best Bruce imitations of all time as he whoops a few older guys! Solid acting performances all around, particularly from Lo Lieh, Angela Mao, and Phillip Ko. Don Wong started off giving a great acting performance, but his display of emotion was a little disappointing to me during a major event of the film, which knocks him down a few pegs. Man Kong Lung is awesome as the lone bandit "Sparrow", his character just oozes cool! The brothel owner was also a feisty woman and played a good, unlikable character!

The fights range from solid, to very good.. The film starts off with few fights, and mainly consists of Don Wong playing defense as he is bullied due to his vow not to fight.. But it picks up steam as the movie goes on, and there is a pretty steady incline in both quantity and quality of the fighting. This may be my favorite fighting performance from Wong Tao, he does a lot of different things here; Most impressive are his kicks, this guy can jump kick in a split second without even bending his knees, and he does a lot of em here! Angela Mao is also great, this was actually my introduction to her, and I can't wait to see more. I can already see why she is so well regarded, good acting and fighting. She also does plenty of bootwork here, and even has some motorized saw blades on her shoes. Phillip Ko is a bit of a let down here, but he isn't bad, I've just been pampered into expecting excellence from him everytime! Lo Lieh has an awesome character, who wields a really cool weapon.(a chain with two rings on each end, which he tries to loop around his enemies head/limbs, and control them). I am mentioning this in my fight part of the section, because he mixes this into his fighting to good effect..

The two best fights of the film IMO are Angela Mao vs Lo Lieh, and the finale. In the former, it's really the only time Angela Mao gets to fight in the movie, and she looks great. Lo Lieh was more "weapon based" in this fight, and the nature of his weapon makes for fighting that comes down to editing and acting as much as it does choreography....and he aces it! Angela Mao just looks great all around, particularly with the kicks, and she/ the action director do a good job of matching her moves to Lo Lieh's movements as he grimaces and smirks while manipulating her with his chained rings.

The finale between Wong Tao and Lo Lieh is great all around. Lo Lieh is an evil bastard and does a rather heinous action directly before they begin throwing down.. In this fight, he actually gets to fight hand to hand more than use his weapon, although it is used to great effect here as well. Wong Tao goes super hard, with his signature intensity, and jump kicks-a-plenty.. How it all plays out makes it even sweeter, and with the nature of this movie - you really aren't even sure who's gonna win!

Anyway, a pretty exceptional independent kung fu flick. It probably falls short of the best of the best, but it's hanging out somewhere real close. A layered plot, solid (mostly) acting, some very good fights that seem to have purpose in the narrative, and a memorable finale make this one a winner. This was directed by Pao-Shu Kao, who I am not familiar with. This movie was great though, and the fact that she is a woman director of classic KF flicks garners my interest!

**Dance of Death (Hong Kong, 1980: Chen Chi Hwa)** - Angela Mao plays a young boy (or a girl pretending to be a boy, couldn't quite work out which) who tricks two old masters into teaching her kung fu so she can get revenge on a white haired villain who is going round wiping out his rivals. The villain's reverse horse boxing style is seemingly unbeatable until the two masters devise a more feminine style which they teach to their pupil.

The film is very much in the style of 'Snake in the Eagle's Shadow' or 'Drunken Master' with a light hearted first hour full of comedic escapades, which some might find tiresome, giving way to a more serious finale. Although there are plenty of well choreographed action scenes in the first hour it all seems a bit 'light weight'; especially a fight with Dean Shek that seems to go on forever (non-Dean Shek fans should avoid this).

The last 20 minutes however are pure quality as we get one massive long fight scene which sees the pace of the action increased considerably. It also makes good use of the superkicking villain although Angela Mao herself is no slouch, putting her Chinese Opera training to good use. If the style of choreography seems familiar it should as Jackie Chan was one of the action directors and the sequences carry many of his trademark moves.

**Dance of the Drunk Mantis (Hong Kong, 1979: Yuen Woo-Ping) - aka Dance of the Drunken Mantis; Drunken Master Part 2: Dance of the Drunken Mantis** - I'm not sure if *Drunken Master* is the first film to feature the drunken fist style. I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't. I can't help but wonder if it ever showed up in the 100+ Wong Fei-Hung films that Kwan Tak-Hing made back in 1950s and 1960s, or in some obscure mid-70s kung fu film. I honestly wouldn't be surprised if that were the case. Of course, we can credit Jackie Chan's landmark film with popularizing the style, which makes a huge difference. And with a film as popular as *Drunken Master*, I think it's only logical that the filmmakers at Seasonal Films would get it in their minds to make a sequel.

Casting Jackie, however, was probably out of the question for the studio. After all, Jackie had merely been on loan to them from Lo Wei when he made the *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow/Drunken Master* double-feature and Jackie was now hot property. Seasonal Films didn't want to get involved with whatever dirty work that getting Jackie to switch studios would have entailed—as it turned out, it would entail Jimmy “the” Wang Yu acting as mediator between Jackie and Lo Wei's triad buddies. As such, it was probably easier (and cheaper) to build a film around *Drunken Master's* other star, Simon Yuen Siu-Tin.

The resulting film was essentially a remake of *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. In order for that to work, writer/producer Ng See-Yuen took two assumptions from the previous film and turned them on their heads. The first is that Beggar So/Sam Seed was the most powerful fighter in the land. After all, in the first film, the King of Sticks was afraid to fight him until he realized that Sam Seed wasn't drunk. Moreover, when Sam Seed showed up at the final battle, Thunderfoot was anxious to get him out of there for fear that he'd have to fight the old beggar. To get past that, Ng See-Yuen simply expanded the universe, so that the aforementioned “land” was only Southern China, meaning that there were kung fu masters just as powerful living in the North. Enter the villain: Rubber Legs (Hwang Jang Lee).

The other assumption that Ng See-Yuen snuck around was that drunken fist boxing was the most powerful style around. We learn here that such isn't the case. For one, Rubber Legs is the most powerful fighter in the North not because he uses drunken boxing, but because he's been able to merge it with other styles. But just as Ng expanded the background setting from Southern China to all of China, he also expands to the background of the drunken fist style itself. No longer is it a powerful style in itself, but a subsystem in an entire family of styles—it's sort of the reckless prodigal younger brother of the family. As bizarre as the uninitiated might think drunken boxing is, it's pretty normal compared to the wacky styles that the film's protagonist will learn in the last act.

Let's see: main character (Yuen Shun-Yee) who's a put-upon orphan (although Yuen Shun-Yee's Foggy is at least adopted here)? Powerful kung fu master of a Southern style who's being hunted by an even more powerful master of a Northern style? Protagonist who'll have to learn a new style because his first master's technique isn't enough to defeat the villain? Yup, sounds like a reworking of *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* to me.

We kick off the film with the introduction of a Sam Seed impersonator (Brandy Yuen, one of the film's choreographers and probable stunt double for his dad) being mistaken for the real deal by Rubber Legs and his student (Corey Yuen, *Righting Wrongs* and *Fong Sai Yuk II*). While impersonating Sam Seed may be great for scoring oneself some free wine, it does very little to protect the impersonator from the student's Eagle claw technique and the false drunkard is sent to meet his maker. I should point out here that the Eagle Claw used by Corey Yuen in this sequence is the actual *ying jow pai* (Northern Eagle Claw) and not the three-fingered Southern variation that usually shows up in films.

We then meet our protagonist Foggy, who's just been fired from the restaurant he worked at for beating up a couple of unruly patrons. He meets his adopted father, Sam Seed (although neither of them are aware of the fact at the moment), when he tries to prevent him from beating up a con artist who made his girlfriend act pregnant in order to extort money from the old beggar. Since the con artists get away, that can only mean a nice beating for Foggy at the hands of the drunken master himself.

The next character we meet is Sam Seed's wife (Linda Lin Ying, who played a different role in *Drunken Master*), who's busy beating up a loan shark (Chin Yuet-Sang, another of the film's action directors) with her hyper-flexible kicks. Sam Seed shows up at home shortly thereafter, only to get into a fight—with fisticuffs, not words—with his wife over his prolonged absence. Evidently our drunken hero isn't so heroic after all and never sent his wife a red

cent while he was out wandering around Southern China. Foggy shows up and we learn that Sam's wife had adopted the boy while her husband was out and about. Sam Seed is less than pleased about the situation, since he considers the boy to be an idiot.

As it turns out, Sam Seed isn't *quite* the deadbeat bastard his wife thinks he is; he actually did send her money, the bank simply neglected to pass it along to her. So, Sam Seed and Foggy take a trip to the bank to find out what happened. Cue the long "comic" sequence involving Dean Shek (*The Fearless Hyena* and *A Better Tomorrow II*). Shek shows up as the unscrupulous bank owner, who not only kept Sam's money for himself, but apparently worships some mythical Chinese entity known in the English dub as "The Great Scrooge," which makes him feel as if giving refunds is beneath him. Banker Shek should've watched the first film, especially the sequence involving Iron Head Rat, to see just how well Sam Seed takes to swindlers. By the end of the fight, Sam Seed has taken every gold article (bracelets, chains, rings, teeth) that Banker Shek had on his person.

Up to this point, the movie has done a fairly solid job of portraying Sam Seed as being the lovable old kung fu rogue that he was in the last film, who just happens to have a wife whom he routinely neglects in order to wander around and beat people up. He's still likable guy, albeit with a few character flaws. That part of his character is seriously undermined in the next scenes in which he finds himself compelled to teach Foggy kung fu. While his methods are just as tortuous as they were for Freddy Wong/Wong Fei-Hung in the first film, Sam Seed spends the bulk of the training berating and verbally abusing his adopted son. It really transforms the character from a drunken boxing teddy bear to a miserable old goat.

The underlying problem here is that we're dealing with different character archetypes here. Sam Seed came across as being so endearing in *Drunken Master* because his pupil, Jackie Chan's Freddy Wong, was something of a prick. He was lovable prick, but a prick nonetheless. He needed Sam Seed to humble him and put him in his place. Freddy Wong deserved a fair amount of the abuse inflicted on him and it ultimately made him into a better fighter, if not a better person. When you have a protagonist in a kung fu comedy who's an arrogant boob, the master should been in the Sam Seed mold in order to give the guy what's coming to him. That's how it goes.

Foggy, however, doesn't belong to the Freddy Wong "lovable jerk" archetype. He's more in line with Jackie Chan's character from *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, the poor orphan who doesn't know kung fu. That sort of character needs a more empathetic kung fu teacher, not Sam Seed. The fact that Sam Seed treats him probably *worse* than he treated Jackie Chan's character in *The Drunken Master* makes him a very unsympathetic character for most of the film's second act.

The movie gets back onto surer footing with the big showdown between Sam Seed and Rubber Legs almost an hour into the film. What begins as what looks like a meeting of two old drinking buddies quickly grows intense the two trade blows while doing otherwise innocent things like exchange cups of wine or try to down shots. It doesn't take long before any pretext of friendly drinking is thrown out the window and Sam Seed is giving Rubber Legs a firsthand demonstration of the "Eight Drunk Gods" technique. All is well for Sam Seed until Rubber Legs switches styles from drunken boxing to the drunken mantis, which his opponent is totally unprepared for (note that whenever Rubber Legs starts revving up his drunken mantis technique, a snippet from Goblin's score to *Suspiria* is played in the background). Sam Seed gets a taste of his own medicine and it's only through Foggy's intervention that he survives to tell the tale.

We now enter the obligatory training sequence of the film. While fetching some herbs for his adopted dad, Foggy happens upon a cottage out in the middle of nowhere whose sole inhabitant is a sickly fellow who lives in a coffin (Yen Shi-Kwan, *13 Cold-Blooded Eagles* and *The Master Strikes*). The guy turns out to be not only a powerful kung fu master, but he's Sam Seed's brother as well. This is where get a bit of background on drunken boxing (at least in the film's universe). You see, drunken boxing is actually only a sub-style of a family of kung fu styles, which includes the book style, the magic style, and the sickness style. Apparently Sam Seed had championed the drunken fist technique to the detriment of the others, which inevitably left the door open for Rubber Legs to defeat him. After a couple of friendly duels, the sick master agrees to train Foggy in the other three sub-styles.

Amusingly enough, *Dance of the Drunk Mantis* has even *more* fight action than *Drunken Master* had, fitting 14 different fights (minus the training sequences) into its 94-minute running time. Its predecessor, on the other hand, had 13 fights during its 110-minute duration. Like *Drunken Master*, this film is able to create a separate identity for most of its fights, incorporating different styles, actors, and objects into each individual scuffle. For example, in his first fight, Corey Yuen uses the Northern Eagle Claw style. In his second fight, he uses drunken boxing. Finally, he wields a spear in his final dual with Linda Lin and Yuen Shun-Yee. Likewise, Linda Lin uses her wondrous legwork in her first two fights and then a two-edged straight sword in her last fight. That last part should be expected; after this film she made a career out of training non-martial artist actresses in swordplay for roles in *wuxia* movies.

One point that *Dance of the Drunk Mantis* has over the previous film is that there's more drunken fighting on display than in the previous film. The first film waited for the last half hour to really show us any drunken boxing. Not only do we get some drunken boxing courtesy of Simon Yuen (and his stunt double), but there's a nice, brief drunken duel between Yuen Shun-Yee and Corey Yuen in the middle of the film. Moreover, Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee also gets to bust out both drunken boxing *and* drunken mantis, which helps the action a lot.

Yuen Shun-Yee acquits himself well enough in one of his few major hero roles. His physical talent is undeniable; he performs kung fu and acrobatics with the same level of aplomb that Jackie Chan made a career of doing. He handles physical comedy well, especially when transforming pulse-taking and knee reflexes into powerful kung fu. His only drawback is that he lacks Jackie Chan's natural charisma. He's not a personality vacuum or anything, but he lacks the innate charm that allowed Jackie to be likable, even when playing arrogant or prankster characters. He came off better later on playing the villains in films like *Dreadnaught* and *Shaolin Drunkard*.

Hwang Jang Lee comes pretty close to stealing the show as Rubber Legs. Despite the name, Hwang's legendary superkicking is toned down in favor of more intricate handwork. He's just as versatile as ever, however, and he convinces with both his drunken boxing *and* his mantis techniques, despite the fact that he never formally trained in either of them. He does get to perform a few good jumping kicks, including one where he locks his opponent's head with his leg, jumps high into the air, and then performs a back kick on the guy.

I'm less inclined to complain about this film being something of a remake of Yuen's earlier film because it's not only well done, but because it was simply a product of the times. Yuen Woo-Ping would later direct a few other films that add substantially to the kung fu comedy sub-genre, so I can live with him copying himself once or twice (he also directed *The Magnificent Butcher* that year, which was closer in spirit to *Drunken Master*). The movie does lose some points for its less-than-sympathetic portrayal of Sam Seed, and I think that a few of the fights, especially the early ones with Linda Lin, lacked some of the energy of *Drunken Master's* fights. That said, it's still a very good kung fu comedy and one of the better examples out there of a film following the Seasonal Formula, as it is a movie about such an iconic style of kung fu.

**Dark Lady Of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1981: Pearl Cheung Ling)** - The directorial debut of Pearl Cheung, one of the few female filmmakers within the martial arts and fantasy realm that steered her boat behind AND in front of the camera, *Dark Lady Of Kung Fu* shows signs of the manic content Pearl seemingly liked on screen but it would be more refined in *Wolf Devil Woman* (an uneven movie in itself). *Dark Lady Of Kung Fu* delights when everything is moving really fast but being cute and comedic isn't Pearl's strengths. She plays Black Butterfly, a mix of Zorro in looks and Robin Hood in intent as she steals from the rich and gives to the poor. Unmasked she leads the gang of 'Monkeys', her little band of homeless thieves. All while there is a price on her head as Black Butterfly.

Incredibly incoherent until Tien Feng mercifully says a few words that leads up to the sight of a BIG cannon, in between comedic incoherency usually rules but a fair amount is saved when Pearl undercranks every action, sets every action to exaggerated sound effects and the production design is wonderfully ludicrous at times. Highlights include a clam shell bathtub her character bathes in and a stone robot helping her to train kung fu and get beauty treatment so ideas are there and the usage of modern pop music, the "Pink Panther" theme and primarily Riz Ortolani's music from *Day Of Anger* is a fun (and probably illegal) inclusion.

**Darkest Sword, The (Taiwan, 1970: Kim Lung)** - An evil man (Yee Yuen) cripples his old master and steals the dark sword that this one just made. The old master tells him that his dark sword will be defeated by a golden sword and vows revenge. Believing that he is invincible with his dark sword, Yee Yuen begins to challenge all the swordsmen of the Feng school, which is the best in the region. The old Feng master's son is in love with one of his father's students (Cheung Ching Ching), but she loves the best student (Kong Ban). The master's son challenges Kong Ban and tries to kill him and in order to save himself, Kong Ban is forced to fight and cripples his friend. Believing that his son is dead, the master sentences his best student to death, but, listening Cheung Ching Ching who was witness in the fight, his wife helps him to escape.

Desperate, Kong Ban breaks his sword and swear that he won't fight again, but he meets with the evil Yee Yuen who wants to challenge him. As he refuses to fight, he is beaten by the evil, saved by a blind girl and disappears. After the massacre of almost all the Feng's students, there are only Cheung Ching Ching and a former student alive and they search for Kong Ban in order to ask him to help them to destroy the evil. He doesn't want to break his vow but after an explanation with the blind girl, he realizes that his duty is to avenge his master. The blind girl has found the golden sword and the two of them, with Cheung Ching Ching, the former student, the master's son, who wasn't dead, and the evil's master, try to destroy the evil.

A very good plot, great fights and, as usual, Cheung Ching Ching and Kong Ban are excellent. This movie is worth to be watched.

**Dead and the Deadly, The (Hong Kong, 1983: Wu Ma)** - THE DEAD AND THE DEADLY is one of three kung fu ghost comedy classics made by Sammo Hung back in the early eighties. The first was the watershed CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE SPOOKY KIND (1980) in which he starred and was the director, while the last was the equally seminal MR VAMPIRE (85) starring Lam Ching Ying that Sammo produced. As for the second, made in 1982, DEAD could be considered as the most obscure and least appreciated of the trio.

"Fatboy" (Sammo of course) is the great-nephew as well as the main assistant of an elderly Taoist priest (Lam Ching Ying) who also runs a funeral artifact manufacturing shop. One day a funeral party comes into town carrying the corpse of the long missing prodigal son (Lucho) of a rich local family with his very pregnant widow following in tow. That sounds odd to Fatboy however who as Lucho's best buddy, knew that the man despite his name (which means "Fucking Big Dick") was utterly impotent. Suspecting foul play, he therefore disguises himself as one of the big paper dummies set in the funeral parlor, and when left alone, inspects the body with the intent to even open it up to prove his suspicions. Actually though, Lucho (Wu Ma) is very much alive, part of a scam to appropriate some valuable family antiques. To keep Fatboy at bay he fakes being a ghost and scares him into leaving him alone. At this point however, Lucho's accomplices decide to really kill him and so the charade becomes reality as Lucho is murdered and really becomes a ghost. In order to revenge himself against his killers, he obtains the help of Fatboy by possessing his body so as to use it as a lethal tool. The problem is, if anything goes wrong, it will be Fatboy's turn to become dead and ghostly.

DEAD AND DEADLY brought Sammo and Wu Ma together in a classic big and small buddy pairing. While Wu Ma actually directed the film it's Sammo who co-wrote it, making the film as much his as Wu's. Like Sammo's two other kung fu ghost comedies, DEAD AND DEADLY combines kung fu action along with folklore horror, ghosts, supernatural schtick and much broad burlesque all placed in a period setting (here the Qin dynasty year of 1864). The kung fu action/stunt/acrobatic element however has been seriously reduced in favour of very inventive and colorful burlesque routines involving among other things - body probing, ghost mischief and of course zany Taoist magic rituals. They do tend to be a bit longish and some contemporary viewers might find them too slow as well as too broad and old for their taste. Action wise, the film actually limits itself to two relatively brief scenes. Wu Ma (or actually an acrobatic double - probably Yuen Biao) fighting back his would be assassins before being killed by them. And later on a scene with a possessed Sammo getting revenge on the killers, (one of them a Sammo regular Chung Fat) is a superb action sequence showing Sammo at his acrobatic, fighting and mimicking best (remember he's suppose to be possessed by Wu Ma's character). All too short but thunderous nonetheless.

As with its two companion pieces DEAD AND DEADLY is very informative on colourful Taoist rituals and Chinese supernatural lore. Advice to the merry widow, do not meet your lover in front of your late husband's funeral tablet. Advice to ghosts, watch out for women's underwear, as they're lethal for your kind. In DEAD AND DEADLY you can see Lam Ching Ying for the first time take on the part of a cool but caring Taoist priest. Unlike the version he would create three years later with MR VAMPIRE, in DEAD AND THE DEADLY his character is quite elderly and the difficulty he has performing some of the rituals given his frailty as well as the help he receives from his assistants as a result are very much a part of the film's slapstick. Seeing him you would never suspect the man is just barely thirty. Besides been a nice showcase of the Chinese colorful lore, DEAD AND DEADLY is an equally laudable showcase of Chinese theatre. Indeed this reviewer has long sustained that kung fu cinema's foundation was Chinese Opera itself. That is never more obvious than with kung fu comedy, as DEAD shows all too well. Thus besides some of the acrobatics occasionally done by the performers, the film also displays theatricality with the characters being introduced with written script on the screen. In addition to this is the featuring of typical comic routines as well as archetypical comic characters (such as the perpetually drunk family scholar or the funny head-monk), which are taken right out of Chinese burlesque and irreverent theatre. So in a way that many Westerners don't even suspect, DEAD AND DEADLY is quite instructive about Chinese theatre tradition.

One important character not mentioned in the synopsis is Yuen, Fatboy's sweet fiancée played by the lovely comedienne Cherie Chung. She appears only briefly at the beginning but the last fifteen minutes of the film belongs totally to her as she makes a heroic effort to save Fatboy from a dreadful fate. It's a superb portrayal of female valour, resolution and love that contrasts sharply with the way women had been depicted up till then in the film. The thing is that the vast majority of kung fu comedy gives a rather unflattering if not downright misogynistic portrayal of woman. Bitchy prostitute, duplicitous scheming vixen or horrible shrew is far more prevalent than the nearly non-existent sweet girlfriend. While Hong Kong martial art/action cinema by in large does indeed glorify the image of the woman warrior, in the case of kung fu comedy a brand of "by the boys for the boys" comic sensibility is playing here which all too evidently subscribes to some feudal (old), puerile and chauvinistic ideas about women. Which is why in such a context Cherie Cheung's Yuen character feels so exceptional.

There are a couple of other interesting details on the film: its actual Chinese title is "PEOPLE SCARING PEOPLE" which is a bit odd, and rather unimpressive. As usual in a Sammo driven film, it features most of his usual troupe of character actor/ stuntmen like Lam Ching Ying of course, Chung Fat, Chan Lung and others. Amusingly, those actors who had played bad characters in Sammo's earlier CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE SPOOKY KIND now play good guys in DEAD AND THE DEADLY and vice versa with Chung Fat who originally portrayed a good sorcerer but was cast as an evil one here

The DEAD AND DEADLY co star/director Wu Ma is better known to the casual Hong Kong western movie viewer as the fierce Taoist swordsman of the CHINESE GHOST STORY series fame, as well as for his cameo turns in countless Sammo Hung movies starting with the big man's directorial debut THE IRON-FISTED MONK (77) up until Sammo's thus far last of his personal movies, DON'T GIVE A DAMN (95). Besides a rich career as a character actor, Wu Ma was also a seasoned director of his own right starting in the late sixties. His output was somewhat uneven however with the sorry habit of often making second rate versions of trend setting movies such as CHINESE GHOST STORY and ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA which he redid to some degree as PICTURE OF A NYMPH (88) and KICKBOXER (92). Some of his movies are worthy efforts however; THE DEAF AND MUTE HEROINE (71), WITS TO WITS (74) and DEAD AND DEADLY have been deemed his best works. Strong women characters tends to shine especially in some of his movies like the aforementioned Cherie Chung in DEAD, Helen Ma in DEAF AND MUTE and the entire female ensemble cast of his STAGE DOOR JOHNNY (90).

DEAD AND DEADLY might not be quite as action packed as it's companion pieces, so some viewers might find the film a little slower or even duller by comparison, but in it's own peculiar way it is more precious and haunting. The film also got one of the more emblematic of Sammo performance as we see him go from the earthly earth bound Fat-boy, a paper dummy to an acrobatic lethal human weapon, then a hysterical ghost and finally a dead body. That last appearance reminds us that behind Sammo's action and laughs there is always an undercurrent of tragedy and melancholia in his film. In the final analysis DEAD And DEADLY's last quote is "life is short might as well enjoy it when we can". When we consider that Barry Wong who helped Sammo write this script as well as many others (like PRODIGAL SON (82) HEART OF DRAGON (85) EASTERN CONDOR (87) and PEDICAP DRIVER (89) died in his forties, nine years after DEAD AND THE DEADLY's making, this is wise advice indeed.

**Deadly Angels (Hong Kong, 1977: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - In bursts Deadly Angels (made at Shaw Brothers) contains wicked energy, first showcasing the female squad at hand demonstrating a variety of weapons skills (belonging more to fantasy than reality) involving slingshots with exploding projectiles, spike-balls etc. No complexity occurs subsequently as targets are criminals and the movie is not afraid to punish us with violence either to emphasize that fact. The ladies of the cast are also fairly well immersed in the fight action where power and rapid intensity nicely carries a few of these scenes. But coming and going in terms of energy is not quite good enough for Deadly Angels and it ends up merely being a watchable curiosity. Starring Evelyn Kraft, Lau Wing, Dana and Nancy Yen.

**Deadly Breaking Sword (Hong Kong, 1979: Sun Chung)** - This is a very good movie, with a great cast. Sun Chung does a superb job with the narrative *for the most part*. It starts out building characterization with seemingly no main conflict, but as soon as I began to think that, everything was tied together well. There are some subtleties in this regard that I really liked; IE when Fu Sheng first meets Shih Szu and calls her Madame, she gets offended...but why, that's what she is? I didn't think about that 'til it was revealed later in the film. Although the film falters a bit near the end, seemingly important characters and sub-plots basically disappear; and Fu Sheng's characters intentions become a little contradictory and fuzzy. Also, this isn't a film for easily offended women, all of the main men in the movie have very low opinions of women in general, although they get a foot in their mouths sort of, lol. There are some slight magical elements involved, but I felt they help the plot and add some fun.

The acting is great across the board, Ti Lung and Fu Sheng's characters who are basically polar opposites work well together and are played excellently. This may be one of my favorite performances from Fu Sheng, I thought he was hilarious as a knife twirling happy go lucky guy, and some great slap stick fighting led by Tong Gai helped! He does his usual over the top humor, but there are also some hilarious subtle expression changes and such. Ti Lung's super serious character is funny at times(not sure if its intentional, I feel it was), but his gimmicks are awesome as well. He shows up with a coffin prepared for each opponent, doesn't unsheathe his sword unless absolutely needed, and finishes by breaking a piece of his sword into their shoulder blade. Chain Wai Man is badass as one of the main baddies, and Ku Feng, Shih Szu, and Lily Li do excellent acting jobs as expected, although they don't fight. The characterization is great all around, although as I stated above, Fu Sheng's becomes a bit cloudy by the end. I watched this dubbed, and felt it was one of the best dubs I have seen. Funny at times, and probably often at times when the dialogue was meant to be funny anyway, but also does not confuse the narrative.

The films setting and tone are overall pretty dark. I liked it and thought they were good, they also help Fu Sheng's comical character stand out more. The swordplay is fantastic, it is grounded, with no wire work, although there are some exaggerated elements(like the name of the film), they work and I enjoyed them. Ti Lung's arrogant character shows in his fighting, and Fu Sheng's happy-go-lucky character show in his. I really enjoyed that you could see their personalities of the characters in the choreography.

Overall, a pretty damn good dark comedy-wuxia from Sun Chung. There are some flaws in the narrative, but they don't keep this from being a highly entertaining flick with very good action, direction and acting. I am bad in that I always want to "rank" films, but I don't like "rating" them, so that's my defense! Haha.. SO, I'll say this may be my 3rd favorite Sun Chung wuxia behind Avenging Eagle and Human Lanterns.

**Deadly China Doll (Hong Kong, 1973: Huang Feng) - aka Opium Trail** - Charming stranger Pai Chen (a solid and engaging performance by the handsome Carter Wong) arrives in a small town to settle an old score with nefarious local hoodlum Scarface Wu Hsu (essayed with deliciously wicked élan by James Nam), who runs an opium smuggling operation. Hsu is planning a drug deal with a rival crime boss that Chen decides to thwart. Feisty young lass Hei Lu (lovely and petite Angela Mao in sturdy two-fisted form) helps Chen out. Writer/director Feng Huang relates the simple, but effective and engrossing story at a snappy pace, maintains a tough gritty tone throughout, and stages the fierce and dynamic martial arts confrontations with considerable aplomb. Mao stands out as a fluid, graceful, and overall formidable fighter; the sequence in which she beats up a gross fat slob rates as a definite exciting highlight. Wong likewise impresses with his precise skills and agility. Best of all, the bad guys are quite slimy and hateful. A nifty kung-fu outing.

**Deadly Confrontation - (Taiwan, 1979: Chang Tseng-Chai)** - DEADLY CONFRONTATION is one of those Taiwanese kung fu cheapies film in the countryside. The story focuses on a ruthless villain who has taken over a large mine and is now oppressing everybody in sight. The heroes are a bunch of fearless fighters determined to bring him down at whatever the cost. This film features low rent production values throughout but a fast-paced story that doesn't really give the viewer a time to get bored. It's acceptable enough fare, making good use of a couple of Shaw cameos to see it through: Lo Lieh pops up for a single scene, while Yueh Hua has fun as the master villain of the climax.

**Deadly Duo, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Chang Cheh)** - Evidently Chang Cheh having a weekend free was too much to ask, since this paper thin (and rather short, running barely 80min) fight fest seems to have been improvised in great haste to get something to stick in theatres.

Although this is a David Chiang/Ti Lung film, they have little of their usual chemistry (beyond some tickling). The whole plot mostly revolves around some patriots crossing a rickety bridge to rescue a prince. After maybe the 460th attempt has resulted in some boob falling to his death, you'd think they'd pack up and go home. Chiang enters the film late to demonstrate some funky flying (as Jimmy Wang Yu might say "nice jumping") and then it's more fighting and a gruesome, yet poetic fate for at least one of our heroes.

As a piece of entertainment, no complaints. But even lesser Chang Cheh usually have some really good interaction between the leads and some interesting subtext, so I'm afraid this is very much a wafer-thin outing.

**Deadly Knives, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang II-Ho) aka Fists of Vengeance** - Sometime after the Japanese occupation of China, Master Ogawa has designs on the forests owned by Master Yan desiring them for the Japanese Militia. Yan Zi Fei, Master Yan's son, is in love with Guan Yue Hua whose father is Guan Fu Lin. Master Guan tries to appease the Japanese by arranging a meeting with Yan to discuss his properties. Yan refuses to sell to the Japanese. This leads to a sinister plan between Guan and Ogawa to produce a fraudulent deed of sale to be registered by the Mayor who is paid off by the two devious conspirators. After Master Yan is wrongfully murdered, the violence escalates until the Yan family and school is nearly wiped out. After further tragedy, Yan Zi fei and a few remaining followers launch a final assault on Ogawa and his cohorts to take back the stolen lands and restore the Yan family name.

A highly dramatic and overly violent basher from Korean director Chang who also helmed the similarly themed THUNDERBOLT FIST the same year. DEADLY KNIVES is the most interesting of the two as more care is given to the characters and also the presence of Ling Yun offers a better lead than Chuan Yuan in the former. Another in a long line of Chinese vs. Japanese fist and kick movies that followed in the wake of THE CHINESE BOXER (1970). This one is handled with a bit more flair as a number of the characters are given some depth and the villains are suitably nasty.



One thing can be said for villains in Shaw Brothers movies-they really knew how to make the most despicable and loathsome bad guys to ever grace the screen. All the villains here are greedy for either money, power or flesh and some a combination of all three.

Ling Yun is in top form here as the protagonist, Yan Zi Fei. A much different role for him as opposed to his swordplay roles especially his turn as the memorable Yi Tien Hung from CLANS OF INTRIGUE (1977) and LEGEND OF THE BAT (1978). He was apparently a popular actor starring in a number of movies throughout the late 60s and 70s including GUN BROTHERS (1968), TWIN BLADES OF DOOM (1969), THE MIGHTY ONE (1971), SIX ASSASSINS (1971), THE BIG HOLDUP (1975) and KILLERS ON WHEELS (1976). He was a versatile actor who could do everything from action to comedy to drama. Like Yue Hua, he's begun to grow on me as an actor and I'm appreciating his work more than I did before.

There's a suitably dramatic and tense scene during the mourning service for Master Yan. After realizing Guan's involvement in the wrongful sale of the forests, Guan Yue Hua shows up to pay respects. Yan Zi Fei explains there is no reason for a Guan family member to attend and that their future plans together are dissolved and that she should never again come to his house. He then explains with his back to her sobbing face, "For revenge I may come and kill your father one day. When that time comes...how could I burn incense at YOUR father's altar?"

Ching Li is also good as Guan Yue Hua who during the opening train sequence, we learn that she and Yan are in love with each other but this future relationship is strained after the above mentioned scene. She doesn't feature in any of the action scenes. In fact, none of the women fight here including Lily Li who suffers the most indignities. She is also in love with Yan and despises the fact that Yan doesn't reciprocate her affections.

The traitorous Su Chian brings down the house of Yan by breaking in to steal the deed for the lands as well as obtain the seal. He ends up murdering Master Yan in the process. He ultimately delivers the deed in exchange for Jiao Jiao as well as a percentage of the profits of the forestry business. It's not too difficult to guess how he ends up especially when you try to put stress on deals with Japanese villains in kung fu movies.

There's also a lot of sexual imagery in this film including the first time in a kung fu picture I've ever seen a guy fantasizing about a woman stripping down just before the scene hints at masturbation which leads to an attempted rape. In another scene, Jiao Jiao is being raped by Ogawa and another Japanese rushes over to watch. Another scene has Jiao Jiao, now half crazed after her rape, thinks Yan Zi Fei is Ogawa come to have his way with her again. She removes all her clothes so as not to be forced into the act. Yan rushes outside only for Jiao Jiao to kill herself with a cleaver. Ching Li also doesn't get away without being put into harms way as she, too, is nearly raped towards the end of the film.

Chan Shen, who made a career out of portraying slimy miscreants, doesn't let you down here as the Japanese killer Ishikawa. He uses a sword but also carries a gun, and in a first, the weapon doesn't sport one of those red tassels usually seen dangling from firearms in HK movies. He has a sort of western style duel during the final moments with Yan using his "Deadly Knives" (which considering the title, do not make an appearance until the last 15 minutes) against Ishikawa's gun.

The action choreography by Yuen Woo Ping and Yuen Cheung Yan is superlative and a bit more accomplished than similar films from the same time period. The finale features a free-for-all bloody mess of a battle with much of the cast either painting the walls crimson or suffering from stab wounds or sharp implements jutting out from their bodies. The demolition of the school sequence at around the 40 minute mark is also exciting and filled with lots of bloody violence. The action has a much better flow and rhythm as opposed to other bashers and that's not slagging those other films, but here, the fights are more consistent in their stunning showcase of combat. Then again, this could be aided by the deft handling of the characters by the director.

All in all it adds up to a highly enjoyable and unfairly neglected motion picture. If you are a fan of films such as KING BOXER (1972), THE CHINESE BOXER (1970) or others like BOXER FROM SHANTUNG (1972), you owe it to yourself to check this one out. Another hidden gem in the Shaw crown has been discovered.

**Deadly Secret, A (Hong Kong, 1980: Mou Tun-Fei)** - Having had the secret of a kung-fu style and what's referred to as a deadly secret entrusted to him, Ting Dien (Jason Pai) is thrown in prison and tortured in order for Magistrate Ling Tui Si (Yueh Hua) to get his hands on said secret. Ti Yuen (Ng Yuen-Jun) is put into jail with Ting Dien as well with hopes of being able to extract information but he becomes his disciple and aid against Ling Tui Si and anyone after the deadly secret. Mou Tun-Fei (Men Behind The Sun) one and only stint at Shaw Brothers making martial arts,

the tale is very grey in tone, at times brutal and the slight morality tale told here is of above average standard when it could've been expected to be a run of the mill production. Jason Pai is iconic behind long hair and fighting in chains and Mou Tun-Fei keeps viewers interested all the way through the finale reveal that might've even survived sans an end fight as *A Deadly Secret* ultimately comes off as more than just a kung-fu film. Also with Shih Szu, Dick Wei and Walter Tso.

**Deadly Silver Spear (Taiwan, 1977: Sung Ting Mei)** - Jimmy Wang Yu plays a ruthless but honourable hitman known as the 'Silver Spear' (on account of his favoured weapon) who finds himself manipulated by even more ruthless warlords determined to wipe out their enemies. When a clan leader known as 'The Master' kidnaps Wang Yu's lover to force her father, a skilled weapons maker, into building the dreaded death disks (dreaded weapons that look like frizbees with saw blades) 'Silver Spear' comes to the rescue.

On the face of it the plot seems quite straightforward but it is fairly intricate for a kung fu movie as the principal characters all plot against each other with much double crossing and back stabbing (no pun intended). There's enough intrigue in the story to keep it interesting.

As it's a Jimmy Wang Yu film I wasn't expecting wonders from the fight scenes but the action here is handled well by Lau Kar Wing and Wang Yu doesn't look too bad. What always comes across from a Wang Yu film though is the sense of energy injected into all his fight scenes and despite his awkward style you still come away believing (or I do anyway) that he's a capable fighter (which of course he was famous for off screen). There's also a fair amount of originality in Wang Yu's fights and this film is no different. Here we see Jimmy facing all kinds of weird adversaries including a fire breathing Blackie Ko, a tree climbing kung fu master and even an underwater killer. There's plenty more in this film for you to discover for yourselves and the action comes thick and fast. The final showdown especially is excellent which sees Wang Yu face Chang Yi.

**Deadly Strike (Taiwan, 1978: Wong Fei-Lung)** – aka **Bruce Has Risen** - Marketed shamelessly on not only the copied image of the late Bruce Lee embodied by another performer (Bruce Li) but Bruce Lee himself, it's a shame *Deadly Strike* was soiled by such cheap tactics because it's nothing like *Bruceploitation*. The connection is a Lee-ish war cry or two on the dub and the casting of Bruce Li but *Deadly Strike* takes its cues more from a 'Dirty Dozen' template instead. While basic drama and character information merely acts as filler in between the rather packed fighting showcase (also choreographed by director Wong Fei-Lung), the movie is rather enjoyable as a basic kung fu movie. Mostly thanks to the action being very solid, Wong choreographs several intense scenarios and ends suitably furiously as FOUR essentially squares off against Chen Sing (who in turn gets a terrific intro fighting off cobras as he demonstrates snake style). Also with Lung Fei in a rare role reversal for the otherwise constant kung-fu bad guy.

**Deaf Mute Heroine (Hong Kong, 1971: Wu Ma)** - A rhythmic hypnotic drumbeat cascades over the solitary female character silhouetted against the blood red background. The pace of the drumbeat is quickened as she is surrounded by a large group of men with deadly intentions. Her sword is raised above her head in cutting edge readiness as the men circle around her looking for an opportunity for a quick strike, for a quick kill, for a quick reward. They attack – one by one, two by two – in a fierce rush, in a cacophony of sound – the woman becomes a quick silver flashing and spinning instrument of death – her sword swirling and slicing – everywhere – then the men draw back – many of them left on the ground with the stillness of death hovering above them. They catch their breath and attack again – and again – each time to be driven off - with more lifeless forms covering the ground like piles of leaves on a late autumn day. One left and a geyser of blood signals his demise. The woman is alone once more – only kept company by the ghosts of the mass of slain men around her. The drums continue – but she doesn't hear them; she is silent because she cannot speak – she is the Deaf Mute Heroine! She sheathes her bloody sword with a snap of her wrist and walks away. The drums stop.

So begins this very cool 1971 film directed by Wu Ma and starring Helen Ma. It is considered one of the classic female martial arts films from Hong Kong and for the most part it lives up to its reputation. Helen Ma didn't strike me as overly gifted in her action scenes – a bit slow of foot and I think doubled for parts of it – but she does bring grace and a strong brooding presence to her role. Wu Ma's direction, editing, choreography and imaginative use of the environment more than make up for Helen's lack of martial arts skills. The fights certainly push the limits of believability, but are wonderfully inventive, very violent and terrific fun to watch.

After the initial action (which actually takes place as the opening credits unfold), Helen escapes with a bag full of valuable pearls, but soon is being chased after by a gang of villains led by another tough female. Helen is attacked again and is badly wounded but is able to escape into the woods where she collapses. A kindly farmer takes her in

and tends to her cuts and of course they fall in love. He isn't in the least bit suspicious about her wounds, her background or how she is able to catch a fly in her chopsticks (a device of course that was used in *The Karate Kid*).

This being a martial arts action film this idyllic life eventually comes to an end when the villainous female and at least forty of her male minions track Helen down. The fight is lengthy, bloody, full of flying hats, flying darts and flying daggers, incredulous jumps, piercing poles, twisting somersaults and death. Lots of death. This is only the warm up though for Helen's final encounter with a masterful swordsman looking to avenge himself. This final duel is a sumptuous smorgasbord of kung fu swordsmanship that is just palpitating.

The character and this film should have been a perfect set up for a series in the manner of Japanese films like *Lone Wolf and Zatoichi* – but regrettably that never occurred. You are left wanting to know more about this mysterious woman – where did she come from, how did she become so masterful with the sword – questions that go unanswered as she walks away – alone again in her silence.

This film has been released by Xenon on video (oddly under its real name!). The image is not very clear (pictures above are from the back of the box), the subs often are cut off at the side or fall below the screen (though dialogue is not that essential in this film) and there is a logo in the top left hand screen for the entire film – but as far as I know this is the only available place to find this film – and I am glad I did.

**Death Cage (Taiwan, 1989: Robert Tai) – Aka: Bloodfight 2; Mortal Combat 2: Death Cage** - In the city of Bangkok, there are two very "important" schools, those being the Wai Chai School (whose master is a real sissy) and the Kents School, ran by farang Joe "I beat Chuck Norris" Lewis. During a tournament, a Kents fighter named Lai Chai (Kam Seung-Yuk, who looks like Lam Ching-Ying on steroids) beats the Wai Chai's top student, See Hom (Robin Shou, of the *Mortal Kombat* films), by cheating. While working See Hom's leg over with brass knuckles, his master tries to intervene and gets his leg permanently broken for his troubles. The Wai Chai school is disgraced and closes down, although to be honest, we never had much evidence that the school had any more than three students.

Some months later, See Hom's master and his worthless adopted daughter is living with him at his car garage, when they are visited by the master's brother-in-law, Tang Chuan (the Ghost-Faced Killer himself, Mark Long). Tang Chuan decides to pass his wushu and tai chi skills on to See Hom via exercises that involve objects at the car garage. So See Hom is slowly becoming a real kung fu master, while the lack of decent competition for the Kents school means lower betting profits for its owner, Mr. Hunter (Joe Lewis). Thus, a rematch between See Hom and Lai Chai is in the works. And what will happen when See Hom proves to be more than a match for Lai Chai \*and\* the Kents star fighter (Steve Tartalia)? Then we'll see just how dirty these farangs are willing to play.

*Death Cage* is little more than *The Karate Kid* with a few extra helpings of stage blood for our actors to be doused in and spit up. Beyond that basic premise, not very much in this movie makes any sense. I don't know how the Wai Chai school could have become so popular when the master is so against fighting that he encourages See Hom to \*let\* a bunch of random Thai thugs wreck his garage in front of his face. How could a sissy like that run a school capable of producing the only competition worthy of the Kents Gym fighters? Oh, yeah, I remember now: bad writing.

If you were to judge the film on the first three fights or so, you'd wonder how Robert Tai ever reached the exalted position at the Shaw Brothers that he once did. The first fights in the ring, especially those between Robin Shou and Kam Seung-Yuk, who wears a lion's mane wig and is decked out in leopard print, are rather lackluster. Shou's punches and kicks are pretty basic, broken up by the occasional drop kick or throw. Still, Shou did better work in the American *Mortal Kombat* films than he did here. Things pick up a little during his first fight with Tartalia, since the latter is a more dynamic fighter. We didn't see much of his skills in *Once Upon a Time in China (1991)*, but Tartalia is actually a first-class kicker. His moves are more stylish than Shou's, who turns out to be a more economical fighter.

The movie picks up in the second half, with several 1-on-2 and 1-vs-many fights. These dwarf those earlier ring fights, and choreographers Lo Rei and Robert Tai feel much less restrained in their choreography. We see Robin Shou take on a bunch of machete-wielding Thai thugs (probably the only Thai people in Thailand we see in this film), with a rhythm that recalls some of Jackie Chan's better group fights. Shou's moves are still pretty basic, but the direction itself is solid. Mark Long gets two fights, his main one being against Mr. Hunter's two bodyguards, a white girl and a black girl (both of whom are blonde, if you care). Those two girls have a lot of acrobatic moves and moving-in-tandem choreography, which is really neat and comes close to representing the high point of the movie.

Later, Mark Long's daughter, whom we saw practicing baguazhang earlier, takes on the two female bodyguards in a brutal and vicious fight in closed quarters. The movie ends with a rematch between Robin Shou and Steve Tartalia and then a final fight against Joe Lewis. These two fights are set in a bamboo cage adorned with sharpened stakes. By this point, Tartalia's character has trained in classic kung fu as well (watch for a cameo by the late John Ladalski as one of his teachers), so the two are better matched. Shou gives the best wushu-centric performance of his career in this fight, with lots of traditional handwork and forms being integrated into his kickboxing. Tartalia, while still

showing us some great bootwork, backs it up with some more classical kung fu movies as well. It actually becomes less interesting when the legendary Joe Lewis steps in, since he's obviously over the hill (although he's still pretty built) and his moves are even less flashier than Shou's (Lewis does try to make up for it with some bizarre overacting). Things get outrageously violent as characters get impaled in different ways and nobody faints from blood loss, Thai people, where muay thai was invented (or at least popularized), aren't even worth mentioning despite the red paint being splashed about. But when these characters die, boy, do they die hard.

So what does this movie teach us? It teaches us that in Thailand, you have your Chinese kung fu schools, your kickboxing schools ran by white people and held afloat financially by gambling, and the actual muay thai schools founded and run by Thai People.

**Death Duel (Hong Kong, 1977: Chor Yuan)** - 'A swordsman's lot is not a happy one' seems to be the moral of this adaptation of a Gu Long novel; one of many from Shaw Brothers premier director Chor Yuan. Derek Yee plays the head of a sword sect who has become weary of endlessly facing challenges and goes into hiding after faking his own death. His many enemies, however, are still eager to find him and eventually he is forced to come out into the open for the final duel. Interestingly Ti Lung and David Chiang have cameo appearances, both as swordsmen whose careers have gone off the rails but both in quite different ways.

The thoughtful and intelligent story provides the framework for well choreographed and captivating action sequences. Beautifully shot, the fights, arranged by Tong Gaai, are fast moving affairs which make much of the skill of the actors and certainly do not feature the 'anyone can do' style of martial arts seen in earlier swordplay movies. Like many of their productions, the wonderful interior sets give the film the surreal feel that is unique to the Shaw Brothers; the use of autumnal colours in the wooded scenes creates a particularly haunted effect.

**Death Duel of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1979: William Cheung)** - Very good movie, with a decent story, above average fighting, with a few great fights. All of the fights in the movie are above average, but nothing special for the most part.. With that said, whenever any combination Wong Tao, John Liu, and Eagle Han fight each other, it is pretty exceptional. As much as I want to go with my guy Wong Tao, I have to say of the three he had the weakest (but still very solid) performance...although he did have the best single move of the movie, more on that in a bit!

John Liu was very impressive with the boots in this one, I mean at times he throws close to ten kicks with one leg without letting it touch the ground. More surprising, I feel he showed a wider array of kicks than he usually does. He seems to do it all from sweeps, roundhouses, to jumps! I am not familiar with Eagle Han Yin, but this guy was a great screen fighter here, and a good bad guy to boot! He is a very graceful yet powerful looking kicker, who also showed a huge variety of kicks in this, as well as being good with the hands. His ability to go from a sweeping trip-kick to a high roundhouse was pretty awesome.

Now on to Wong Tao.. I feel like they told him not to kick a lot in this because they already had two huge kickers! While he doesn't show a lot of variety in this one compared to other films, he still shows some impressive acrobatic feats, and his usual high intensity. Oh yeah, speaking of his intensity, he straight jump kicks Eagle Han in the mouth, and it connects.. No, this isn't masterful choreography (well, it is, but you know what I mean!).. The man gets kicked right in the face, and not with a little leg extension kicks, a flying jump kick! I literally said "holy shit!" out loud when it happened, and proceeded to rewatch it 3 times before finishing the movie.. Serves them right, they should have let him kick more!

The acting is pretty bad here for the most part. Wong Tao is a better actor than what he showed in this. With that said, John Liu acts well in this, and his charisma is a good counter-weight to Wong Tao's intense demeanor. The story is nothing special, but there is a little bit of mystery surrounding a couple of characters that keeps it interesting. There are even a few subtleties in the camera shots that don't hit you til' a couple twists are revealed! There are some sweet locations, grassy plains, forests, and an outdoor building with huge statues surrounding it! There are also some cool training scenes. They aren't super creative, but what the actors do in said scenes is actually impressive....no wires/effects!

Anyway, while the story isn't horrible, this is a fight movie... Especially if you want to see some kicking action. While it has been a while since I watched a John Liu flick, I think this has to be one of his best performances overall! Wong Tao is his usual intense self, and shows some good acrobatics, while Han Ying is just masterful looking. Throw in a pretty lady, and some solid minor fights, and you have a pretty damn good flick!

I feel like I should remember/comment on the other fights in this more than I did.. Both fights with the men with spears vs Wong Tao and John Liu are very good as well, but the end fight reaaaaally overshadows it. Similar to the umbrella fight being overshadowed by the finale in Tiger Over Wall, but not quite as good.

**Death Duel Of Mantis (Taiwan, 1978: Kuo Ching-Chiang) - a.k.a Strike Of Mantis Fist** - The honest but dim-witted Xiao Hai(Ting Wa-Chung), works for the one of the local crime gangs, led by Master Lu(Lung Fei). Xiao agreed to give them five years off his life, in exchange for paying for his father's burial. Meanwhile, a local noodle stall owner and his daughter Ho Hwa(Kam Yin-Fei), are out for revenge. Master Lu killed the stall owner's wife, during a past dispute. When Xiao Hai falls for the stall owners daughter, he must eventually decide which side he will fight for?.

*"The art of the Chicken Fist, is in the fingers, use your arms like wings"*

Old school Taiwanese comedy and Kung Fu mash-up, from the Kuo Hwa Motion Picture Co.Ltd. Directed by Kuo Ching-Chaing(The Gamblers Duel), this production is yet another attempt at re-creating the magic and success, Seasonal films had with Snake In The Eagles Shadow & Drunken Master in the late 70's. While the opening credits start to roll, the movies honest but IQ starved hero Xiao Hwa, can be seen chopping up fire up wood. Displaying some very creative ways to stack chopped wood. It's clear from the opening, that our hero is just a lackey who's given all the un-wanted jobs around his Master's school/villa. A trope that must feature in nearly every comedy Kung Fu picture? made at this-time.

A trio of talents shared the action director duties, So Kwok-Leung(Chase Step By Step), Chim-Lung(Eunuch Of The Western Palace) and finally Lin Kuang-Yung(Iron Neck Li). The first dust-up takes place in none of than the local Casino. A decent brawl ensues, and soon tables are being over turned and every one's busting out the shapes. One of the choreographers So Kwok-Leung, has a nice minor role playing one of thugs. He performs a great move-set against a fighter, whilst the pair are on top of a small table. At least one of the few tables that's remained up-right. The fight breaks out onto the village streets, where it's get a little sloppy in style. Our hero who was sent on errand to the casino, also gets caught up in the melee, that quickly turns to comedy hi-jinks. A lot of the fight/action is marred by comedy, which has been handled far better in movies like The Victim(1980). The hero progressively gets better at fighting and handling himself, as the story progress, which I felt worked really well here. While the goofing around might grate at times, it's not all bad and things get more serious in the last thirty minutes, which I'll get back to later.

Lung Fei, is on top form as always, playing the old crime boss with a love of the Chicken Fist style. Watching him go through a serious of feathered and beak inspired forms, is something else. While still managing to remain tough looking and straight faced as he does so. When rival gang leader Master Sher(O Yao-Man) turns up with his two bold headed sons Choi Chung-Chau and Ma Cheung. Master Lu makes easy work of the boldy brothers, with his unique use of the vicious elbows and fists. The-majority of the choreography is based on empty hand to hand combat, and some might find it a little light on legwork and weapons displays. We still get treated to some nice kicks during the finale, which I'll get back to. Anyone looking for weapons based action, will want to look elsewhere. One of the early fights, that stood out to me, features Cliff Ching-Ching(Fighting Ace) going up against Ting Wa-Chung. They toned down the comedy for this one, and we get to some nice solid and well- staged shapes action. The fights in the first hour really are a varied bunch, varying from good to bad, and sometimes all within one short throw down. Two of the choreographers work I've seen before, in the 1974 production Chase Step By Step. Which featured both So Kwok-Leung and Lin Kuang-Yung behind the camera. The scuffles in that picture, were much more consistent in terms of their style. Maybe Death Duel Of Mantis suffered from having a third person contributing their ideas?.

*"Get out of here, unless you want more punishment?"*

Feisty female butt kick Kam Yin-Fei, makes an excellent debut as the noodle girl Ho Hwa. The actress would only go on to appear in one more film, with a minor role in Challenge Of The Lady Ninja(1983). It's odd that she would not appear in any other movies. With there being some years between these two pictures. Did she have other roles we are just not aware of?. It doesn't make much sense, especially if you have seen what she was capable of. Xiao Ha spends a lot of time trying to impress this lady, and get hold of her hanker chief. Which will allow him to take her hand in marriage. Which might sound quite straight forward, if Ho Hwa wasn't so skilled with her hands and feet. She is a treat to see in action on screen, and steals a lot of the films early scenes. When she's not showing up the hero, she is fighting the local lackeys. In many of her fights, they make good use of her ability to the splits, and perform some strong high kicks. Yes, this girl could kick, ok we don't get to see a Hwang Jang Lee level display. Yet she's still more than capable of planting a foot in a foes face. She's also very good at performing flips from the floor onto her feet.

Before we get to the high action showdown, our hero must of course complete his Kung Fu training. Out in the Wilderness, the Noodle Man has retreated with his daughter. It turns out he is a Master of the Mantis Fist, which alone is not enough for Master Lu's aggressive Chicken Fist. Earlier in the movie, Lu smashed two men's ribs, with his deadly elbows, causing them to spit blood from the impact. The three decide they need to combine their styles. The training montage is pretty-short but to the point, with even a few exercise methods I'd never seen on film before. Eventually the three make a fierce fighting team, with Mantis, Chicken and Eagles Claw styles merged.

Like many of the independent features of the time, the quality of the action improves in the final chapter. The last half hour is much more serious in tone, as the focus turns to revenge and facing the evil gangster. Master Lu does what every bad guy has to do, follow the trusty well-meaning sidekick to the bamboo hut. He brings his two top lackeys, in the form of obnoxious Mr Chu(Yau Pang-Sang) and actor Cheung Chung-Yau, who's character is nameless. Soon the six are going all out in a fight to the death, in what is the single best action sequence of the entire runtime. Mau Ging-Shun(Snake & Crane Arts Of Shaolin) puts on a strong performance as the old noodle loving Master. When Lu knocks him through the bamboo fence, the fight spills out into the Taiwanese country side. With the mist clad mountains, making for a very moody and atmospheric back drop. We really get to see Kam Yin Fei's and Ting Wa-Chung skills, as they make easy work of the tag along thugs. Then combine for the story's final epic face-off, which involves some very impressive Wu Shu style legwork from Wa-Chung. Not to mention, some nice assisted kicks and other team work. The chicken like strutting from Lung Fie is priceless, and very hard to over-come.

*"So my friend we meet again, you can leave your merchandise there"*

Death Duel Of Mantis is an average Martial Arts comedy, that features an above average ending. Along with some impressive moves sprinkled through the course of the story. Such as when Xiao Hai, perform a stunning series of victory somersaults. When he eventually gets holds of his love interests hanker chief. Pre to seeing him here, I'd only caught Ting Wa-Chung in Hero Of The Wild(1977), starring alongside Chan Sing. From what little of the star I have seen, I'd say he more suited to this comedic role, than the more serious one he had in Hero Of The Wild. Special mention should go to actor Wong Deng-Wo(World Of Drunken Master), as one Master Lu's more morally minded employees. While this movie might not be a classic, it's just above average for a low budget feature from 1978. Mostly thanks to the last thirty or so minutes. If you look at the directors filmography, you can see that Kung Fu movies were not his specialist area. There's just one thing that left me really puzzled, why does the hero carry a small white china tea pot, for most of his early scenes?. It's never explained, at least not in the English dubbed print released by Vengeance Video.

**Death On The Docks (Hong Kong, 1973: Cheung Sum)** - Ex-con Hsu (Alan Tang) tries to put his life behind him but gets pulled into area of crime again. A fully standard and predictable action-drama (where the martial arts is of the basher-variety), through some actual sincere passages of drama here and there, Death On The Docks manages to become above average as a narrative. Maybe because one might not expect much from it but adding to this anyway is terrific action choreography by Lau Kar-Wing and Huang Pei-Chih. Alan Tang, not much of a kung-fu player, corresponds very well to the hard hitting and sometimes very fast nature of the brawls. Making this effort bearable whilst people are experiencing the downbeat drama and rather compelling when they're fighting for their lives that ultimately ends at the docks. Yea, English title was a bit spoiler-ridden in nature.

**Death Ring (Hong Kong, 1984: Chang Cheh, Lu Feng)** Forgive my crank, but this is hardly classic. The usual descendants take revenge for their ancestors. Chen Kuan Tai was wasted here, although Ti Lung provided some much needed comic relief as what I can only describe as early 1980s Thai Pimp Extortionist who gets in the middle of the kid who murdered Chang Sing's son over a girl. All I can say is, it was fun to see Ti deploy some Lu Feng choreography and even more fun to see Lu bust out in the finale. I will say the choreography was much stronger earlier in the film. And I have the same problem with this movie as I do any movie with the post Venoms besides the Five Elements Ninjas bunch, the new young actors have absolutely zilch charisma and are painfully hard to sit through. So I was delighted to see Lu Feng pop up every so often and in the final fight.

In hindsight though, I wish this film was about Ti Lung's Pimp Extortionist who is so proper he has to remove the cape and bust out black gloves in order to fight.

In terms of mid 80s Chang Cheh, **Death Ring** is completely skippable.

**Delightful Forest, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Cheh, Pao Hseh-Li)** - Fourth time is the charm. Honorable gallant Wu Song (Ti Lung) avenges his older brothers' death (by killing the brother's wife and lover) and takes full responsibility for his crimes. When the son of the prison overlord (not the warden apparently), gives Wu Song special treatment, the young swordsman is suspicious. Ultimately, the son asks Wu Song to get rid of the criminal elements who have over taken his lucrative restaurant (the title place) and other properties, Wu agrees since he only fights bad guys. At first, this is easily accomplished but corrupt politicians stick their greedy hands into the mix and work on getting rid of Wu Song. Silly politicians.

The film has a very coarse tone (appropriate given Wu Song's fondness for drink and heroism) and this, along with the obvious court corruption, felt very ugly and foreign to me the first 3x I watched. Now that I've got a lot more of Chang Cheh / Shaws under my belt, I finally understand this film. Wu Song is as good as they come, but he's also rakish, brash and has the kung fu to back up his words. The violence is pretty raw and vicious (the injury Wu Song suffers in the final fight makes me wince terribly, it's painful) and most of the characters are absolutely awful. This character juxtaposition reveals Wu Song as very just, honorable and good hearted. It's been done before, but I really appreciate seeing it here as a way to enforce how rare a man like Wu Song is in the movie's universe.

Ti Lung gives a ridiculously energetic, playful and dangerous performance as Wu Song. It's nice to see his kicking abilities used so heavily here, it's a different aspect of his martial prowess and boy was he on fire. This film had four choreographers (both Laus, Tong Gai and a forth gent), which makes me quite curious as to what Pops and Tong Gai came up with (I suspect Lau Kar Wing had a big hand in the awesome opening fight.)

So, yes, you can count me as another fan of this film. It almost feels like a spaghetti western (the use of Morricone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* music only reinforces this.) I appreciate being able to watch Shaw Brothers films a few times and do a complete 360 with my opinion. They've made me a bit more of an open minded genre film fan. It's neat to be able to expand upon or completely revise my thoughts on a film I may have blown off simply because I did not understand the characters, context etc. I enjoy seeing the heroes triumph over evil, it's what I grew up with and where my mind is at now. So you go Wu Song!

**Demon Strike (Hong Kong, 1979: Mun Yiu-Wah)** - This movie was released on VHS as part of the "Wu-Tang Forbidden Treasures Collection," which was essentially just a bunch of classic kung fu movies released with the "Wu-Tang Clan seal of approval." I'm told this is one Hwang's few collaborations with the renown Shaw Bros., although I don't know if it had any kind of U.S. release. The copy of the movie I watched was pretty scratchy and was in Mandarin with those burned-on English subtitles that seemingly disappear whenever there's white on the screen. So it comes across as a movie needing some degree of restoration.

*Demon Strike* is a *wuxia*(flying swordplay fantasy) film and for those of you who watch a lot of kung fu movies, you know that such is an indicator of a pretty convoluted storyline. During the credit sequence, we're treated to some weird images (or normal images presented in a weird way) that basically depict a robbery of some gold bars and a book or something.

After the credits sequence, we see Master Chiao (Leung Kar-Yan) hanging out at some tomb when he's randomly attacked by a bunch of lamas (Tibetan monks, not the animals). He beats them up and because of something they say, he figures out that something important has been stolen from the capital and sets out to figure out what's going on.

Meanwhile, King Yu (Hwang Jang Lee) is upset at the theft from his castle and sends his best "catcher" (the subtitles were bad so I assume he means bounty hunter), Master Pao (Jason Pai-Pao), to track down the thieves and bring back what's been stolen. Accompanying Master Pao is Master Tung, Pao's servant and confidant; an old guy who fights with a bullwhip; and some other fodder...I mean men.

So Master Chiao is going through the mountains on his way to meet up with the Beggar's Gang, the which he's a leader of. On the way, he meets up with some Taoist monk-looking dudes who try to beat him up WHILE PERFORMING VODOO ON HIM (maybe this is where they came up with the idea from Steven Seagal's *Belly of the Beast*). The voodoo is part of a mysterious style called "Maoshan tricks," which was supposedly lost and stuff.

Master Pao and gang follow a lead to the house of some guy who makes bean curd. This dude supposedly has some

of the stolen gold. After a long fight, the guy is captured and tells Master Pao the names of the culprits but is conveniently killed for his efforts. This brings the wrath of the guy's daughter (who looks a lot like Michelle Yeoh) upon them, which basically means she pouts a lot and sometimes tries to kill Master Pao with a meat cleaver.

Master Chiao convenes with the Beggar's Gang and they decide to try to find the Maoshan Tricks manual that was stolen. Beginning their search at the capital, they come across a couple of masked guys who try to kidnap women. During the fight, the masked dudes use the "channeling technique" (see *Last Hero in China* for another reference to it) which is part of the Maoshan style and one guy's skin becomes as tough as steel. Chiao kills him but the other guy gets away.

During the night, one of Master Pao's men is killed (well, not immediately) by two other mysterious guys. After that, they try to kill Master Pao with a spear and a hula-hoop (once again, brings back memories of *Last Hero in China*). That doesn't work and they flee once the rest of Pao's men show up.

Master Pao and his men make it to the seashore where the hula-hoop guy is hanging out. A big fight breaks out and in the end, the hula-hoop dude loses out. We find out that the spear guy had tipped off Master Pao in exchange for his life, the which he won't even get. Nonetheless, spear guy won't give up without a fight and calls in his cronies to fight. All the bad guys die but Pao loses two more of his team in the struggle.

Master Pao, Master Tung, and the old bullwhip dude continue on their journey. They come across another one of the culprits and kill him, but not before he kills Master Tung. They eventually find the last culprit who of course, is surrounded by guards. However, Master Chiao shows up to assist Master Pao and a big fight breaks out. If you've noticed what's been going on in each fight, you should be able to guess who gets it next. Well, during the fight, King Yu's personal bodyguards show up to kill Master Pao. Pao finds out that King Yu was behind the theft and manages to escape death and meet back up with Chiao and the daughter. They then go back to the capital to fight King Yu, who now has mastered the Maoshan tricks style.

At first the story seems pretty convoluted, but that's mainly because there are a lot of characters to become familiar with. But as the movie goes on, it gets kind of easier for the most part. I thought I'd have to watch it again to figure out what was going on, but eventually it made a little bit more sense. However, to those of you who don't watch a lot of these movies or aren't used to the burned-on subtitles, understanding the movie may be somewhat challenging.

After the tired and unoriginal plots of *Hell's Wind Staff* and *Buddha Assassinator* (I'll review that one soon), it's nice to something a little different. Actually, the storyline is very reminiscent of the storyline of the *Swordsman* movies, especially the second one. Both of those movies deal with a stolen martial arts manual whose style renders the person nearly invincible. Hwang Jang Lee's King Yu character is quite similar to Brigitte Lin's Asia the Invincible. However, Hwang's character is a lot cooler, since he can kick really good and fire lasers from his palms (Asia the Invincible could kill people with sewing needles, but that's small potatoes compared to lasers).

Leung Kar-Yan, who's probably most well-known for the old school movies he made with Sammo Hung, plays Master Chiao. Actually, he's given second billing in the movie but his character really isn't that important. Well, kind of. The character is kind of important, but he's more one-dimensional and usually just shows up to get into fights. Actually, Leung Kar-Yan really wasn't a martial artist but had the physique and talent to fake it really well (much like Zhang Ziyi today). Most of his fight scenes are pretty good and compared to some of the other co-stars, you'd never believed he wasn't a real fighter.

Jason Pai-Pao, who incidentally starred with Hwang Jang Lee in the recently-reviewed *Hell's Wind Staff* has the meatier role as a bounty hunter for the court. His character is fleshed out a little bit more than Leung Kar-Yan's, and we see that he's the type that is kind to his men but is ruthless when it comes to the Court's enemies. Fighting-wise, he's alright (he looked better in *Hell's Wind Staff*) but nothing all that special. He does get to carry a really big sword, which is pretty cool.

As expected, the Hwang Jang Lee is once again cast as film's main villain. As I already mentioned, his character is similar to that of Brigitte Lin from *Swordsman II* but is a lot cooler. He doesn't do much until the last 15 minutes or so. His first fight has him killing one his bodyguards with some fancy footwork and then he gets to fight our heroes in the climax. He fights well enough, although he's not as crisp in this one as he is in his more famous roles. This is the only time that I've seen Hwang Jang Lee fight with special FX. There is some undercranking, some limited use of wires (but not enough to distract from his skills), and then the aforementioned lasers. The latter reminds me of Jet Li's *Kung Fu Cult Master*, where Jet Li jumps into the air and starts throwing fireballs at his enemies.

The fights in this movie range from decent to pretty good. With the exception of Hwang and Leung, everyone else is passable but not remarkable. The choreography in this movie isn't as elaborate and intricate as that of the Yuen



Bros. or Sammo Hung and company. Luckily, it's well-paced and never is boring. The best fights of the movie are in the climax, first where Leung and Pai-Pao have to take out Hwang's army single-handedly. Then our heroes fight Hwang in a long and breathtaking fight. The fight isn't polished, elaborate, or acrobatic like a lot of fights from the era, but it's more brutal and ruthless, as our two heroes struggle to beat an opponent who is essentially invincible.

**Desperate Chase (Taiwan, 1971: Kao Pao-Shu) – aka Blood of the Dragon** - Jimmy Wang Yu is Lung Tai (or The White Dragon) who's gained a reputation as a top spear fighter. When stopping a bunch of the emperor's henchmen bullying young beggar Ni Chiu (Yau Lung), he finds out Ni Chiu is carrying a namelist of rebels opposing the ruling emperor. Bringing it to its destined owner, it turns out the leading rebel is the son of a fighter Lung Tai disgraced once to the point of suicide. But what matters most? Personal revenge or fighting for the well being of the people? And the troops are closing in...

By female director Kao Pao-Shu comes a surprisingly intelligent genre excursion. Never complicating the drama as The Desperate Chase lives and breathes via its frequent fight scenes, it's nevertheless entirely engrossing the journey's on display. Lung Tai has a chance to break his cycle of violence and make a serious, heroic contribution. A journey carried very well within Jimmy Wang Yu while he also with a spear in his hand never misses a beat in providing trademark/requisite fury. Of note is the terrific finale where Jimmy goes toe to toe with multiple henchmen and elite warriors with sneaky weaponry. The heroism of The Desperate Chase resonates here. That's such an important key. Released in America as Blood Of The Dragon and sporting, for the genre, a well-performed dub job but an awful re-score by Flood. Also with Wang Yu's One-Armed Swordsman co-star Chiao Chiao and Taiwan martial arts cinema token baddie Lung Fei (who's taken down to earth a few notches here).

**Desperate Killer (Taiwan, 1978: Ulysses Au)** - I stumbled upon this, rare Taiwan sword fighting epic BIG LAND FLYING EAGLE on YouTube. Keep on mind that I have been into old school action movies for over 20 years, and I must confess to NOT recognizing too many actors or actresses in it. I won't go into plot details too much cuz I don't like to give spoilers in my reviews, but I will give my opinion of it. This was made pre -Drunken Master (remember when Drunken Master came out, every Chinese studio got on the martial arts comedy bandwagon?); so there are no comedic elements to spoil the suspense and intrigue. At the root of the story, it is a love story. The main character possesses an invincible sword (something very common in Taiwan martial arts films) and the bad guys and officials are always hunting him down for. After using his sword to cut down his opponents, he flees the army of bads guys by heading into a desert. While crossing the desert and fighting off attackers, he meets a mysterious woman. They travel the desert together and eventually fall in love. The movie follows the couple and the adventures they face while trying to stay alive. What really sets the movie apart is the locations. Most of the KF films were filmed in Asian forests or mountain ranges. This one pretty much takes place in a great US looking desert. In fact BIG LAND FLYING EAGLE has a very Japanese chambara feel it, with similar imagery right out of the LONE WOLF AND CUB films. The YouTube video I saw was in widescreen with English subs (if you are interested in checking out a good swordplay movie...)

**Devil And Angel (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Lieh)** - Shaw Brothers star Lo Lieh's directorial debut, Devil And Angel is simplicity itself. Lo Lieh wants revenge on former partners in crime (Wu Ma, Tien Feng, Fong Yau among others) after having served a prison sentence. Bashing and brutality ensues. All with his girlfriend (Grace Tong) by his side. Seemingly shot entirely on locations, the wafer thin and threadbare scenario isn't akin to painful attempt at quality. Lo Lieh gets us in and out quickly (the movie is below 80 minutes) and although some footage at the races, mahjong parlor and various chase footage is padding, Devil And Angel does make its point via mostly hard hitting action with often recognizable, favourite faces quickly in and out as well. Examples of that: Michael Chan, Tai Bo, Billy Chan and Fung Hak-On stop by.

**Devil Killer (Taiwan, 1980: Robert Tai)** - A man (Blacky Ko) is framed for crimes committed by the Police Chiefs son, a righteous police officer (Tong Lung) tries to bring justice to the case. That basically sums up the plot of the original footage (Best and Worst 73') of this cut/splice film. Tacked on mostly at the beginning and end are the new footage. Alan Chui is a hired hitman sent to help the corrupt police with their dirty work, and Alexander Lo Rei is on his way to aid Tong Lung for reasons that aren't explained.. I'll assume they're brothers in the film since they're brothers in real life, ha!

The story is pretty bad, but more cohesive than most cut/splice movies. Basically the original movie (Best and Worst) is cut down to half its run time, and ends about halfway through Devil Killer, making way for the tacked on sub plot from Robert Tai and co.. Robert Tai is listed as the only director, but I have a feeling the Filmark crew helped him

"patch things up". The plot to Best and Worst seems kind of interesting as the Police Chief actually doesn't seem to sympathize for his criminal son much. I am not sure if that plot point was ruined for Devil Killer, or if it was that way in the original movie as well; The chief quickly goes evil villain here trying to cover up his sons crimes.. This of course ends the only half interesting aspect of the story. There is not much of a reason to comment more on the story, acting, etc. Its all bad, but at least at times it is laughable.

Best and Worst was made in 74', and the action is pretty terrible even for that time. The best part of the action from the original footage is Blacky Ko, as he kicks more than usual albeit losing his balance often! Most of the fights in this part of the movie are too zoomed in and pretty cut up, no good. Thankfully the bit of Robert Tai choreographed action at the beginning and end is slightly above average fu. Seeing Alexander Lo and Alan Chui throw down can't be anything less than solid, and the standout fight of the movie is probably the short cameos by Robert Tai himself (where he battles Alan Chi and his goons).

Devil Killer is a bad movie as I am sure just about every film for this months topic will be, lol. With that said, I would be a liar if I said I wasn't entertained. I also have to give it some credit for making more sense than most cut/splice Filmark productions. I won't recommend it, but you could do far worse, especially if you at least know what you're getting in to.

It was fun to learn that Tong Lung and Lo Rei are bothers, I hadn't known before this movie. They do bear quite the resemblance.

**Devil's Mirror, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Sun Chung)** - So I watched this again today and in between being confused about clans and magic mirrors, I was able to detect a subplot that is almost identical to *Judgment of An Assassin*.

Before I get to that though, the Jiuxan Witch of the Blood Ghouls Clan wants two magic mirrors The Wind Magic Mirror (which the Bai clan hold) and the Thunder Magic mirror which the Wen clan possess. With these two mirrors the Jiuxan witch can rule over the martial world once she opens Emperor Wu's tomb and steals the Fish Intestines Sword of Invincibility and the Gandoderma which grants longevity. (I think Fish intestines and I immediately see the black vein of a shrimp - different species I know...but... anyway... )

Shu Pei-pei plays XiaoFeng-erh of the Bai family (she is not unlike Miss Sek from *Judgment of An Assassin*) and there's a spy afoot (Leng Yun) within the Bai family (also like *Judgment of An Assassin*) who frames the clan elder so the witch can get the Bai's mirror.

While the Jiuxan witch retrieves her desired items, this being a Sun Chung film you know which side will win. A little note here, I love how Sun Chung's films end.

The end fight is absolutely chaotic, but I have to give it Shu Pei-Pei for her energetic sword fighting (she gets a lot more to do fight-wise than Ching Li would in *Judgment of An Assassin*.) At this point there are Chang Cheh levels of violence, and the two women have the most fun duking it out against the men etc.

*The Devil's Mirror* is particularly colorful and there's an innocent fairy tale air to the whole thing. This film truly taps into the fantasy world of wuxia along with some fun horror motifs for the Jiuxan witch. It almost hints at a little bit of psychedelia in the colors and designs.

This is a decent wuxia, rather silly and definitely aimed at the younger set. It's an interesting piece for Sun to start his Shaw Brothers works with, and I am tickled to pick up the references which would be wonderfully incorporated into *Judgment of An Assassin* some 5 years later.

**Devil's Treasure (Hong Kong, 1973: Walter Chung)** - Wang Chun (Ko Chun Hsiung) is a professional scuba diver who is contacted by a group of shady businessmen who want to locate a mysterious chest beneath the sea. After they offer him a substantial amount of cash, he accepts the job and takes them out to the mapped location to retrieve the chest; turns out, it's a treasure chest full of gold bars!

When the businessmen no longer need Wang Chun's assistance, they suddenly try to kill him; but just as they're about to have their way, a different group of men - who also want the gold - start shooting at the boat. Wang Chun uses the uninvited guests to his advantage; in the process, he outsmarts them all and makes a daring escape with the entire chest of gold in his possession.

From this point, the film continues 6 years later. Wang Chun, his wife (Nora Miao) and their daughter have settled in a luxurious ranch in South Korea. Unfortunately, Wang Chun's past catches up with him...

Following Bruce Lee's death, the years between 1973 and 1978 were a transitional period for Raymond Chow's Golden Harvest film company. During this time, the company shuffled around newer and former leading men to be their next box office draw. Ko Chun Hsiung – along with Jimmy Wang Yu, Carter Wong, James Tien and Don Wong – was one of them (Jackie Chan didn't sign with Golden Harvest until 1979's *Young Master*).

"The Devil's Treasure" is my first Ko Chun Hsiung flick and my initial reaction is a positive one. He doesn't seem to have any martial arts experience, so he relies more on bashing and brawling, than swift body movements to outdo his enemies. Despite the lack of any fancy physical abilities, Ko Chun Hsiung has enough swagger to pass as an acceptable badass.

Nora Miao (*Way of the Dragon*), who is mostly known for being Bruce Lee's co-star on all three of his Hong Kong movies, plays Ko Chun Hsiung's love interest. I've said it many times, and I'll say it again: she's overwhelmingly beautiful. However, her role in this movie is one-dimensional, so other than her good looks and running aimlessly at Ko Chun Hsiung's side, there's not much more she has to offer.

Other notable co-stars include: Sammo Hung (*The Magnificent Butcher*), who has a beefy role as one of the main bad guys; Wang In Sik (*Dragon Lord*), who sports some groovy John Lennon sunglasses; and Tony Liu (*The Dragon Missile*), who has a brief cameo as a thug who attacks Ko Chun Hsiung early on in the movie. One thing that stands out is the 'image' they gave these bad guys. They're all wearing black trench coats and leather jackets which raise the film's cool retro factor.

"The Devil's Treasure" is a lot of fun. As expected, there are cheesy moments and many instances that defy logic, but what do you expect? It's a 1973 Hong Kong flick, not a Sidney Lumet movie. In terms of plot, it's ahead of its time and I can easily see this one being remade today with very little changes in its outline.

I've only seen a pack of non-period, 1970's Golden Harvest titles, but this one sports a decent budget with its explosions, car chases, boat chases and decent shoot outs. Don't be expecting a lot of kung fu action; there is some, but the movie is first and foremost a drama/thriller, with a decent mix of action thrown in to help with the pacing.

**Dirty Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1978: Liu Chung Yung)** - Wong Yue plays a cowardly conman known as the 'Rubber Ball Kid' who tries to make his way as a bounty hunter. Unfortunately his greed isn't matched by kung fu skill and he has to enlist the help of kung fu fighters to bring in the criminals.

'The Kid' struggles to make money from his venture as the fighters he hires always want to keep the reward money for themselves. Even when he does manage to bring a criminal in on his own, such as Dean Shek in a typically comic appearance, the 'Kid' still manages to lose the money and in one case gets into trouble with the police himself so that he actually has a price on his own head.

The Kid decides to have one last try and sets his sights, rather ambitiously, on the most wanted man in the region, played by Wilson Tong. The Kid soon realises he is no match for the killer and manages to persuade two powerful kung fu masters (Liu Chia Yung and Tsui Siu Keung) to help him. However the criminal is too powerful even for them and the Kid rethinks his plan developing his own style of kung fu, the highly unlikely 'Wriggly Eel' style, with which to defeat the seemingly invincible Wilson.

Liu Chia Yung creates another entertaining kung fu romp with a simple but adequate script mixing action with comedy. Although Wong Yue isn't the most convincing of screen fighters this is more than made up for by the abundance of talent from the film's co-stars. The film features some complex kung fu sequences with highly imaginative and original styles. The director's own appearance as the 'Snake Pipe' master is one of the film's highlights. The film also features some excellent swordplay sequences especially in the pivotal scene which sees Wilson Tong fight Tsui Siu Keung. Although Wilson Tong has already been introduced this is the first time we get to see his true power as the film's villain. The impact of the finale is perhaps lessened by Wong Yue's limited fighting skill (he is completely outclassed by Wilson Tong) but overall the film is highly enjoyable.

**Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog! (Hong Kong, 1978: Karl Maka)** - Crazy Frog (Sammo Hung) comes across the 'Invincible Armor', thought lost for decades, and manages to steal/swindle it out of the old lady that owns it. Dirty Tiger (Lau Kar Wing) is employed to bring him back, but once he learns of the armour he comes up with a different plan. He's not the only one - once word of the armour's discovery is out, every man and his monkey seems to want to get it. The most serious contenders are a bandit family led by a white-browed former Shaolin Monk. The movie is a non-stop series of crosses, double crosses, thefts and swindles as everybody tries to get the armour or at least some money out of the situation.

This is one of those movies where everybody is a thief and a conman, and the difference between the good guys and bad guys is mainly their degree of stupidity - though by this criteria, Crazy Frog would probably be the worst of the lot :) The different plots & subterfuges employed are quite amusing - mainly due to their stupidity. There's quite a bit of kung fu employed, with Sammo and Lau Kar Wing both showing off some great skill. Most of the fights are played for laughs though, with more "gimmicky" choreography than realistic fighting techniques. All very much in the old-school Peking Opera style too.

Not the best old school movie, but not a bad one. Definitely worth seeing if you like Sammo and Lau Kar Wing.

**Disciples of Shaolin Temple (People's Republic of China, 1985: Hua Shan)** - So now I'm tracking down kung fu movies produced in Mainland China. They're a favorite of kung fu fans, especially the purists, because of their non-sense stories, production values, scenery, and casts made entirely of wushu (martial arts) stylists. This is particularly rare movie that I was lucky enough to get a hold of.

The version I watched didn't have any subtitles, but luckily the plot was pretty simple. There's this guy who, as I inferred from the events in the movie, is engaged to a fat girl who's also a kung fu dynamo. The actually loves another, prettier girl, but since he apparently can't have her, he decides to become a monk at the Shaolin Temple. The bulk of the first half follows the misadventures of this guy and his colleagues as they get into the trouble and whatnot.

The real conflict begins when a wandering fighter comes to the temple to challenge one of the senior monks to a duel. The senior monks will have none of it and invite the stranger to leave. Upset, he begins picking fights with the four junior monks, who haven't been trained in kung fu yet, and beating them up. Finally, the main good guy gets tired of seeing his friends get whopped and trains for righteous revenge.

The fights, choreographed by Wong Chek (who plays the villain) and Hong Kong stuntman Ng Git-Keung are some of the best I've seen in a Mainland movie. There isn't a lot of action in the first half, although there's a good bar brawl with a guy who does some Mantis kung fu and a scene where the fat girl beats up a bunch of monks with a 3-section staff. The final fight, which begins with a sword/pole fight (watch for the part where they fight while running down a steep slope) and then goes into an empty-hand duel, features a number of styles, including hsing-i, tai chi chuan, and others. It's really good—one of the best I've seen from a post-1982 kung fu film. There's also a good tan tui (springing leg) demonstration and a little kid monk who can do some excellent work with the pole. My complaints about the fights are that we don't get any huge group brawls that Mainland-produced movies do so well, and the fact that several of the fights occur with the junior monks who don't know any kung fu, so the fights seem one-sided.

**Disciples Of Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1975: Chang Cheh)** - Despite the opening with star Alexander Fu Sheng doing martial arts in front of one-tone backgrounds and the English title being rather generic, here's a late, thoroughly engrossing and dramatic effort from a Chang Cheh I always thought left those skills behind earlier in the 70s before embarking on a journey to make movies with plastic heroes (i.e. his Venoms flicks). Disciples Of Shao Lin is something to treasure then, featuring the age old tale of innocence abused by corrupt forces. There's a better take on the theme in Chor Yuen's *The Bastard* but the story of orphan Guan Feng Yi's (Fu Sheng) rise through the ranks of society only to face deception, brotherly abandonment and redemption the gory way is admirable because of its lack of hurry into martial arts esthetics. In fact, it could've worked sans it as well. Chang Cheh remains fairly subtle and has the characters talking a whole lot in order for the hard edged drama to become really painful come ending time. But we're not talking overdone melodrama here, just a fairly hefty running time for the genre allowed to reach a sensible boiling point. In between there's even an unexpected amount of well honed symbolism, particularly well represented by the higher division possession in the form of a pocket watch and its melody. For anyone who's had a problem with the antics of Alexander Fu Sheng, here's a reference performance that's tailor made for the late star. A country bumpkin without any knowledge of the city he's heading into but with a martial arts knowledge that has him being playful in the beginning and being forbidden to fight by his brother, played with the correct amount of stern that actually is torment by Chi Kuan-Chun. Treated as a savior and treated to the good things in life this universe has to offer, including the clock, Fu Sheng switches effortlessly between the light, being a ferocious fighter

and the transformation in progress where the character of Guan only catches a glimpse of himself when it's far too late. An eclectic mix of jazzed up, modern music score feels out of place at times but the main melody enhances the often quiet atmosphere of the film very nicely.

Lau Kar-Leung's action blossoms the most when channeled through its lead, being very fluent and to the point. Lau would return in the same capacity for the 1993 remake *The Barefoot Kid* (directed by Johnnie To). Starring Aaron Kwok, Ti Lung and Maggie Cheung, pre-Milkyway master To injects way too much melodrama into his take on the story that does have the upper hand via a new development Chang Cheh's version didn't take: the understated romance between Ti Lung and Maggie Cheung's characters.

**Disciples of the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber (Hong Kong, 1985: Lau Kar-Leung)** - The brilliant Hsiao Ho plays Fong Sai Yuk, the incorrigible troublemaker whose prodigious martial arts skills make him nearly invincible. His mom sends him off to Shaolin Temple to avoid the beheading, where he gets into even more trouble than before!

I wasn't 100% sure this movie really had anything to do with 'The 36th Chamber of Shaolin', if it really was an official sequel or just borrowed the "36th Chamber" name to help sell the movie upon its initial release, that is until we see Gordon Liu's character in the Shaolin Temple being introduced as San Te. So while Gordon Liu's character was the young man who took training in the Shaolin Temple in the "36th Chamber" movie, we get to see another young man played by Hsiao Ho doing the same thing but under a very different circumstance. Hsiao Ho and his two brothers basically took refuge at Shaolin as they were being sought after by the Manchu's and also so they could better their kung fu skills. During Hsiao Ho's stay at Shaolin, he felt like he already knew it all, that he didn't really need to go through all the various training being taught. Little did he know that what he was learning at Shaolin would later help to save his life. The story is pretty simple to follow, and once the action starts, it really helps to keep the story moving. I know quite a few people claimed to be very annoyed by Hsiao Ho's performance in the Shaw Bros movie 'My Young Auntie, but at the same time admitting to LOVE his role and character in the 'Mad Monkey Kung Fu' film, also released by Shaw Bros. I personally believe Hsiao Ho is a very underrated martial artist, and truly deserves much respect for all the movies he has been apart of for the Shaw Bros film studio. I definitely recommend this movie, give it a shot.

There were some humor elements to this movie, but I would most certainly not call this a comedy/kung fu film. For what little humor there was, it was quite acceptable.

The key word to the action on display in this movie would have to be 'Entertaining'. Gordon Liu's few showcases were just what you'd expect from the 'Master Killer' himself, on point. Since Hsiao Ho is the star of this movie, you can expect him to have most of the screen time in this film in which he did. He had quite a few fight and training scenes which were all fun to watch and had me even more of a fan of this actor by the time the film was done. Most of you may remember him from *Mad Monkey Kung Fu*, which to me was his best performance ever. There were two key training scenes in this movie that were later shown put to good use at the end of the film. 98% of the action was all hand to hand, a few weapons used for good measure. Since this was a 80's made movie, there was some slight wire work in this film, but this filming technique was not used to excessively.

Definitely without a doubt the Standout Performance in this movie belongs to Hsiao Ho. His energetic, rebellious character reminded me somewhat of his *My Young Auntie* performance, just a lot less annoying, and more fun to watch. His acrobatic and kung fu skills can not be denied, he really is what makes this movie such a pleasure to watch.

Fans of Gordon Liu or of the very underrated Hsiao Ho will most definitely want to pick this film up. Some great action throughout the film will have you feeling right at home with yet another solid Shaw Bros movie.

**Dog King and Snake King (Taiwan, 1974: Li Kuan-Chang)** - The dog king and the snake king are both performing in the town streets with their children. When he sees that the spectators are giving more money to the dog king's performers, the snake king's nephew releases the dogs and the spectators afraid leave the street. The two chiefs are angry and fight and finally, they decide to not perform together anymore.

The dog king's son and the snake king's daughter are in love and they see each other in secret, which displease the young girl's cousin, who wants her for himself.

Later, he teams with a local boss (Tien Yeh) who wants to take the control of the town and get all the money he can from the notables and, as his men attack both the dog king's son and the snake king's daughter, the two fathers

decide to team up once again in order to get rid of the local boss, with the help of their dogs and their snakes.

A very good movie, with all that one can ask for : good fights, very good plot, funny scenes with a lot of humor...Worth watching.

**Double Crossers, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Walter Chung)** - In Singapore an old man (I'll call him Dad for this review) is assassinated (by Chan Wei Man), cut forward to the scene of the crime where his son Police Officer Lung (Sin Il-Ryong, To Kill with Intrigue) is investigating. He listens a tape recorder that his father left, where he explains that he used to do gangster business with two partners, Chang (Chen Sing) and Wang (Chiu Hung, King Boxer). Chang didn't care for it, so he moved to Indonesia and got out. Dad says he only did it to provide for his wife and son (Lung), and that he quit when his wife became pregnant. Some time long after Dad and Chang had been out of the business, Wang requested Dad's help, when Dad refused, Wang threatened to frame Lung as a corrupt cop. Dad knew there was no chance of this, as Lung had been getting promoted quickly due to getting information on some of Wang's crews' criminal activities. He explains that he expected to be assassinated, as he assumed Wang would suspect that he is helping Lung get information. Finally, he tells him he is sure if they get him, Lung will be next, and that he has already arranged for Chang to assist him.

End of Dad's voice over. I felt it was necessary to pretty much recap that whole thing. Naturally, Lung seeks revenge, and wants more than ever to put a stop to Wang. It doesn't take long for Lung and Chang to meet up. Apparently Chang has already been thinking long and hard about this, and has a pretty elaborate plan of how to get back at Wang and put an end to his crimes. Lung knows he doesn't have enough evidence to do it the right way, so he resigns from the police force, so he can take matter into his own hands. Chang has Lung go meet another one of their old accomplices, Pai, in Hong Kong. Their main intention is to ruffle some feathers and create a trail for Wang and his men to follow as they have too much power in HK for them to do anything there. After doing so, Lung and Pai are supposed to flee to Boli, where Chang is well connected, and his plan can hopefully really begin to take place.. The rest of the film is mostly a cat and mouse game with the good guys on the run from Wang and his men, lead by Chou (Chan Wei Man)..

To do the story justice, I'd have to pretty much give a complete summary.. That just isn't my style though, and I try to spoil as little as possible about a movie when reviewing it. The story is very gritty and dark, in example, it features a couple of torture interrogations. I found myself genuinely wanting to know what the next part of Chang's plan was going to be, and if things would go as they were supposed to. The plot moves at a fast pace, and many minor character are introduced along the way and some have their own little sub-plots to explain their character. There is some emotional content mixed in to decent effect, although most of it never plays a huge part in the main plot. While most of the characters in this movie are simply either good or bad, Jeng Cheong-Woh as usual manages to give many of them some life with motivations for their actions. The movie is pretty well acted too. Chen Sing in particular does a great acting job, his character is very charismatic, and quite different than most of the stock bad guys I have seen Chen Sing play. While I enjoyed the dub, due to the dark story, good direction, and acting, I'd love to see this one in it's original language. I was surprised by Sin Il-Ryong, I didn't expect him to show some decent acting chops, but he did a good job too. The movie is quite adventurous (as it should be given the plot), and shot at many different city and country locations. The soundtrack is pretty awesome, with music almost constantly playing throughout the film. The tunes were generally funky 70's stuff, but there was also some "heroic" stock music mixed in to good effect.

I have to say I was hoping to see more from the action. The primary reason I checked this movie out was to see Sin Il-Ryong, and I was hoping to see more of his fantastic kicking he displayed in To Kill with Intrigue. While he did show some nice boot work, the editing style of the fighting didn't leave much room for anything too extensive. I can't really complain, because I can see why they aimed for a more "realistic" approach to the fights in this movie.. With the dark and gritty crime story, it does seem fitting to have short but hard hitting fight scenes. The action still manages to be very exciting despite the lack of intricate hand to hand fights. It is well directed, and there are a lot of one-hitter quitters, and smashing props into people.. There is a pretty nice fight between Chen Sing and Sammo (who makes a cameo appearance in some righteous 70's attire!), and the couple short bouts between Chan Wei Man and Sin Il-Ryong were cool, but not what I was hoping to see. There are also a couple of huge mistakes, one that comes to mind being some white guy who clearly had no experience as a screen fighter, he really moved in slow motion! Luckily, he got's aced pretty quickly. The other being having Wilson Tong present, and not giving him a single solid fight scene. There was plenty of non-fight action in the way of a couple fun shoot outs and chase scenes that also helped move things along, and sort of made up for the lack of fisticuffs. One scene I love is where Chen Sing is lighting dynamite with the cigarette in his mouth and lobbing them at his opponents.. Tell me that isn't one of the most bad ass things ever!?! Lol.

While I didn't get to see what I was hoping to in the way of Sin Il-Ryong's kicking, or the fighting in general, I got a much better movie than I expected overall. I should have expected that due to it being directed by Jeng Cheong-Woh, but I guess since the movie doesn't garner much attention, my expectations were low. It was also very cool to see Sin Il-Ryong as the leading man, I was expecting him to just have a minor part when I saw him on the cast. Yes, I was expecting him to have a smaller part, but do more crazy kicking! The story and plot were very fast paced and entertaining, and it was cool to see a gritty sort of "buddy cop" movie made in a time where HK was putting out mostly period films. It features well acted characters, who are mostly surprisingly fleshed out - for a movie of this genre with a short run time.. While the fight choreography wasn't great, it complemented the story and feel of the film, and the non-fight action was very entertaining. Really fun, entertaining movie, I recommend it!

**Dragon Creek, The (Hong Kong, 1967: Griffin Yueh)** - A very engaging action/drama film, set in 1930's China, that provides an interesting portrayal of rural village life. Yet even in this simple setting a minor position of power is not immune to abuse. The story begins with the assassination of a peasant farmer.

The synopsis on the IVL vcd describes the film as a "martial arts murder mystery", and the farmer's daughter (Cheng Pei Pei) as a "Kung Fu Nancy Drew". Both descriptions are tenuous at best\*. There are virtually no martial arts, with firearms being the principal weapon. Nor is there any real mystery to solve. Both the viewer and the daughter are aware of the villain's identity from very early on, but for very different reasons. The viewer is witness to his actions to interfere with evidence crucial to a murder investigation, while the daughter suspects the same person based on an ongoing feud between the two families over water from the Dragon Creek.

Although the daughter does eventually manage to get the investigation reopened, the bulk of the narrative focuses on her attempts to convince her scholarly brother to seek vengeance, despite the cunning villain's ability to use his position to plausibly deceive both him and the authorities. But will vengeance only beget further bloodshed, and bring about disaster for both families? This is the conundrum facing her educated brother, who has respect for the legal process, and on whose shoulders the family's future rests. Tension builds throughout the film which concludes with a satisfying outcome. Unlike many Shaw Brothers films, a short period of reflection follows which seems appropriate given the dramatic content of the film.

Great performances by Cheng Pei Pei, who shows a determined resilience in her pursuit of the truth; and by Lily Li, who is just lovely in this early role as a shepherdess. In keeping with the period of release, several of the characters break into song during the film. This integrates naturally with the story and adds to the charm of the film. I am very impressed by this directorial effort from Griffin Yueh Feng, who also wrote the script. A perfect matinee drama for a wet Saturday afternoon!

**Dragon Fist (Hong Kong, 1979: Lo Wei)** - I wrote out the plot of this as I watched it but.....I'm not going to fool with all that. It's lengthy and it gets convoluted and that's not what I intend these minireviews to be about.

Suffice it say, Chan's choreography is on display here. It's fast and intricate as is his early signature in constructing fight scenes. It seems throughout the movie Chan is sporting a bruise under his right eye that is vaguely concealed with makeup. (I suspect it's the result of an accidental blow received while training for or filming a fight sequence.) His fights are few and short (until the end) but really, really good. In one he pulls off a really nice split kick in the air.

In the end, Chan fights the boss and his 2 lieutenants. At one point, Chan's character loses his temper and unleashes a pummeling on one lieutenant that is absolute overkill. He then fights the second lieutenant who uses spike-tipped tonfas. This is the longest and most intricate fight of the film. Finally he faces the evil boss. It's a good fight but short and it's all Chan. The evil boss' kung fu.....not so good.

Still, there's plenty of good kung fu throughout the film. It has a good story and good acting IMPO. Chan's acting is subdued and oddly enough his character really isn't the focus of the film. My only qualm with this is that it's one of his films where he has no training sequences. Still, his early stuff is his best and this is definitely one you should have for your collection.

**Dragon Force (Hong Kong, 1982: Michael Mak) – aka Powerforce** - Bruce Baron stars as Jack Sargeant, super spy for the CIA and all-around ladies man. When the Princess of Monrovia is kidnapped from her bathtub by a group of ninjas (happens everyday), Sargeant is brought onto the case and heads to Hong Kong. Once there, he hooks up with the Dragon Force, led by Tau Lung (Bruce Li). Following an initiation combat, Sargeant is inducted into the Dragon Force and the entire group heads off to take on the Princess' kidnapper Gen. Marushka, who conveniently lives on Marushka Island. Using an ancient Chinese acupuncture technique, Marushka plans to exert mind control over the Princess, allowing him to control her international affairs pertaining to Monrovia. Will the Dragon Force be able to save the Princess from Marushka's evil clutch?

No doubt about it, from start to finish, POWERFORCE is an absolute blast. The fight scenes are fantastic, featuring everything from poisoned ninja stars to literally exploding ninjas. And while the ninjas may not be the most covert ever to grace the screen in their orange get ups, they certainly deliver the goods in the last half hour, showing up at every treacherous turn. Despite being an odd team of East and West, Baron and Li make a formidable team and both actors get a chance to display their martial arts prowess. Li is pretty somber through out and manages to escape Bruce Lee's shadow by not doing any "clone" nonsense. Surprisingly, while the film delivers tons of action, there are also some great moments of intentional humor. Reminiscent of the British James Bond spoofs of the mid-70s like NO. 1 OF THE SECRET SERVICE, the film definitely has its tongue planted firmly in cheek. How else would one take a scene where a guy sneezes, only to have his contact named "Ah Choo" show up and says, "That's me!" For the sleazy types (Keith), there is also some amazingly gratuitous nudity from the Princess. Everything (and I mean EVERYTHING) is shown during her acupuncture transformation. Well, there goes that PG rating! To make matters even more surreal, her head is shaved bald immediately before the process. A bald headed, hypnotized and naked Princess being painted in Chinese characters...I'm sure there is a website for that fetish somewhere.

While not a shining example of Bruceploitation (the casting of Li is the only reason it is reviewed here), you can't go wrong with this one if you are looking for an action packed good time. It is too bad the film never caught on because this film really helps Li escape the Bruce Lee "clone" stereotype and could have propelled him into international stardom.

**Dragon Fortress (Hong Kong, 1968: Ling Yun) - aka The Tin-Long Gang** - The recent release of many of the classic Shaw wuxia films of the 1960's has allowed many of these movies to be newly discovered and re-evaluated by modern audiences, but during the same period there was an almost parallel cinema taking place in Hong Kong that is still fairly obscure to most viewers. While the Shaw's are generally aligned with Mandarin cinema, there were also a number of film companies making Cantonese films and the wuxia genre was an important component of this. The Cantonese film industry for the most part had their own set of directors and stars and at least until the Cantonese film scene began to collapse in the early 1970's these two didn't intermix that much. Many of these Cantonese stars were enormously popular such as Connie Chan Po-chu, Josephine Siao, Patrick Tse and Wu Fung and these stars were cranking out films at an incredible rate. In the year of this film, 1968, Chan Po-chu was to make nearly 20 films but that was small change compared to her co-star in this film, Kenneth Tsang who made around 25 films during the year.

This though was a problem. The films were being rushed to the theaters so quickly that they tended to be much more poorly produced and with much smaller budgets than their Mandarin equivalents and that is fairly evident in a film such as this one. While many of the Mandarin wuxia films were very ornate with huge sets and large casts the Cantonese films looked extremely underfunded by comparison. This disparity in production values led to the increasing popularity of the Mandarin films and the rapid decline of the Cantonese industry and the near disappearance of many of their stars from the screen. Interestingly, many of the fight choreographers originated in the Cantonese industry but eventually were enticed to work for Shaw. The two best known are Lau Kar-leung and his partner Tong Kai who worked often with Ling Wan, the director of this film. From the mid-60's on Ling directed many wuxia films – often scripted by Szeto On – with perhaps his best known being the series of films called "Buddha's Palm". Though much of "Dragon Fortress" looks low budget, the action choreography is surprisingly solid with good use made of wires and trampolines and it is also surprisingly bloody.

Shang Kuan (Chan Po-chu) is surrounded by a group of men who mistake her for the "Pitiless Sword" whom they are attempting to find and do bodily damage to, but Chan quickly dispatches them and sends them running off. She too is looking for the "Pitiless Sword" and soon finds her at the household of Squire Ma (Tam Bing Man) where she is applying for a job that Ma has posted. He is looking for a few good swordsmen to fight their way into the hideout of Scar Face Wolf (Sek Kin) who has kidnapped his wife and to bring her back. Living up to her nickname, "Pitiless Sword" (Suet Nei) has a perpetual scowl painted on her face and contemptuously tells her fellow applicants to scram and when they hesitate takes a sword to them. At this point Shang Kuan makes an appearance and gladly joins in the fracas to send the men scurrying off before she and "Pitiless" are soon at sword point with one another. Ma though convinces them to work together to get his wife back.



The two women soon enlist two men to assist them – Chin Tien-we (played by Cheung Ying-choi – nicknamed for mysterious reasons in real life as “handsome young man”) and his roguish friend Dih Lung-tsi (Kenneth Tsang) who is pretty handy with phony dice as well as a sword. Dih is also a complete mercenary and wants to be paid by the kill – and after they refuse he soon has the opportunity to show them how good he is by killing a number of Scar Face’s men who try and stop them – he tells them those eleven were free of charge but no more. They take him on. There is a little melodrama mixed in – Chin has a crush on “Pitiless Sword” that is certainly not based on her smile, but she cares only for the reward they will get for killing Scar Face and saving the wife. This avariciousness it turns out has a history – she and Shang are half-sisters and Shang’s mother treated Pitiless so badly that she ran away from home and swore to get rich – by killing. They slowly work their way into Scar’s home turf leaving many bodies in their wake but an interesting twist awaits them that turns the plot on its head and forces them to re-evaluate their mission and their mercenary ways.

The film is fairly enjoyable as it moves at a quick pace and has a fight scene thrown in on a regular basis. With a bigger budget this certainly would have been the equal of many of the Shaw wuxia’s from the same period. The presentation doesn’t help much – though the vcd is widescreen, the print source is quite poor and there are a number of rapid edits that I would guess are due to missing bits rather than to poor editing. The vcd does have subtitles though which is still quite rare for these early Cantonese films. The actors are more than just fine as well. Connie Chan Po-chu was of course one of the biggest stars in Hong Kong at the time and her background in martial arts – taught to her by her parents – is put to good use as she gracefully dispatches attackers. Suet Nei was another Cantonese female action star at the time and in a short period was to appear in many wuxia films before she retired at the young age of 24 to marry none other than choreographer Tong Kai (she later was to return to television). Most interesting though is Kenneth Tsang who was Jeanette Lin’s brother. His acting feels so modern in some ways – very casual and real and lacking in the stiffness that so many of the male hero’s possessed at the time and he gives the film a real jolt of energy and personality.

**Dragon Fury (Taiwan, 1974: Chung Gwok-Hang) – aka Duel at Forest** - While Wen Chiang Lung was cutting wood and talking with his boss, an accident happened and he was accused of murdering his boss and sentenced to jail. Years later, Wen Chiang Lung returns to his village and meets his boss' daughter (Xu Feng) who he helps against some men who are fighting with her.

Later, he learns that the woman he loved is married with Xu Feng's brother, who is a gambler and married her only because she was pregnant. Weng Chiang Lung is hired by the casino's boss as a fighter, but he disagrees with him when he sees that he bullies Xu Feng's brother and orders his men to fight with her and he saves her twice.

Furious and also in order to get the land of Xu Feng's brother, the casino's boss kills him and frames Weng Chiang Lung for the murder. Weng Chiang Lung and the captain policeman were both friends with Weng Chiang Lung's lover and, when it appears that it isn't Weng Chiang Lung who killed Xu Feng's brother, they team up to arrest him and finally, Weng Chiang Lung discovers that his lover's son is also his son. A very good non stop action movie, with an interesting plot. Xu Feng and Weng Chiang Lung are excellent. Worth watching.

**Dragon Gate Inn (Taiwan, 1967: King Hu)** - Like his earlier classic 'Come Drink With Me', in which King Hu drew from Japanese Chanbara influences to create a different style of action in Hong Kong cinema, 'Dragon Inn' begins in an understated manner. Building gradually to an action packed finale. This was King Hu's first film in Taiwan and a success that was as important in contributing to the trend for swordplay movies as its predecessor. Evil eunachs and powerful female swordfighters were to become staple ingredients of the genre.

The plot will be familiar to anyone who has seen Tsui Hark's (rather faithful) remake in which patriot rebels attempt to rescue the family of an upstanding official accused of treason and sentenced to death by the chief eunach. The rebels take refuge at the 'Dragon Gate Inn' while the eunach's men set up siege. Eventually the eunach himself arrives to deal personally with the problem.

While the drama works very well with key scenes being filled with tension, Han Ying Chieh playing the eunach's right hand man with particular menace, and plot being well paced I did feel that the action scenes seemed less accomplished than 'Come Drink With Me'. On its own terms the action is choreographed and shot well enough but compared to Hu's earlier work I couldn't help but be slightly disappointed.

This was Polly Shang Kwan's first starring role, shortly after being signed to the United Film Corp. in Taipei, but this was before she had undertaken any martial arts training and it shows. As an invincible swordswoman Polly is less

than convincing and more than once there appears to be some undercranking to compensate. Fortunately the final battle involves a number of protagonists combined against the chief eunuch and is quite gripping.

**Dragon Lives Again, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Law Kei)** - One of the screwier Brucesploitation films out there is essentially a teenager's fan fiction translated into a live action film, about 20 years or so before fan fiction really became a thing. Leung Siu-Lung (aka Bruce Liang) plays the famous Little Dragon, who has just died and gone to the Underworld. Bruce Lee quickly runs into conflict with the local thugs, Clint Eastwood and Zatoichi. He eventually decides to whip the Underworld into shape, teaching the residents jeet kune do and opposing the local gangs, run by The God father and Father Karras on general principal. Even the promise of a blow job from Emmanuelle isn't enough to sway him to the bad side. So he continues kicking the snot out of everybody around him, including Dracula, his army of men in skeleton outfits ("Zombies" if you will), James Bond, The Man With No Name, and some others. He even thwarts a plot to replace the king with Father Karras, in which the former would get screwed to death by Emmanuelle. And for the record, what exactly happens to someone in the underworld when they "die"?

So yeah, the plot doesn't make much sense, the sets are threadbare, and it's a shoddy production all around. But at the same time, you got Eric Tsang playing Popeye, Nick Cheung Lik (a fixture of Brucesploitation films) playing the One-Armed Swordsman, and even Bruce Lee teaming up with Caine from Kung Fu, which is a character he himself created. The fights are just okay. Leung Siu-Lung was always one of the more talented people to imitate Bruce Lee, and he looks good in his fights. However, you can tell that his heart wasn't in the production. The training sequence has him looking particularly uninterested and almost everybody else, including the "zombies", move and fight like Putties from the Power Rangers. But then again, this movie gives you Bruce Lee vs. Mummies and copious amounts of female nudity and sex. While martial arts fans may get something out of this, fans of the random and the bizarre will probably enjoy this more.

**Dragon Lord (Hong Kong, 1982: Jackie Chan)** - Chinese artefacts are being stolen and sold off by a crime gang led by Whang In-Sik (I don't recall him actually having a name in this one!). Two naughty kids by the name of Dragon (Jackie Chan) and Cowboy (Mars) get unwittingly involved and attempt to put an end to the dirty dealings.

After the humbling experience of filming US flop BATTLECREEK BRAWL, and the excesses of YOUNG MASTER, you would have thought Jackie would have come out with something a little more restrained. Instead, tales of a five hour original running time and a scene that took 2,900 takes puts an end to such speculation. No matter how you look at it, 2,900 takes to get a shot of a shuttlecock being kicked into the back of a net is decadent and excessive. Sure, it looks good, but no shot is worth that much effort. Further compounding the problems is the universally acknowledged fact that DRAGON LORD went into production with an unfinished script (and if you believe co-star Mars, no script whatsoever).

This is generally regarded as the worst of Jackie's own directorial efforts in the 80's. I don't agree – personally, I believe that dubious honour should go to POLICE STORY 2, which was fantastic in places but altogether too dark for a Jackie Chan film. Detractors point to the film's scatterbrained approach, lack of plot and structure, and dearth of actual Kung Fu. Actually, if the film really did have a five hour running time at one point, it does a better job of hiding the fact than YOUNG MASTER.

To everyone who hates this film, I offer a case for the defence. This film is probably the first where Jackie really puts his life on the line for the sake of his art. There are some great shots throughout where he's willing to fall from high places to the hard ground below with no safety measures whatsoever. The bun-game at the beginning, for example, contains a shot of him falling from the top (about 20 feet in the air at a conservative estimate) all the way to the bottom in one shot. Also, in the finale, Jackie and Whang In-Sik are atop the top floor of a cornmill, where Jackie attempts to pull them both off. In the out-takes (presented here for the first time in a Jackie Chan film, courtesy of his experiences of working on CANNONBALL RUN), we see it all go wrong, and Jackie falling painfully to the ground below.

Secondly, the rooftop scene is a blast. It's just so much fun to watch, and ends in a great sight gag. Even here, we see Jackie doing what most action stars in the west wouldn't dare to attempt in one take – climbing a rope all the way to the top of a building.

Thirdly, the relationship Dragon has with Cowboy (or Bull, depending on which version you watch) is quite beautiful in its child-like innocence. When they fall out early on, the scene where they are reconciled without talking about their quarrel is quite touching, and actually very plausible. After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, they carry on like nothing happened.

Fourthly, the shuttlecock scene, for all its excesses, is still great. Jackie had seen that the Hong Kong film industry

had fixated itself on DRUNKEN MASTER, and made a conscious effort to make something different. At least it was innovative, and I still say it's good fun to watch. Admittedly, you wouldn't need to go to such lengths to shoot such a scene now as you could CGI the shuttlecock, but the authenticity is starkly refreshing today in this computer generated world we live in. Actually, you could probably shoot the principle photography in an afternoon nowadays.

Fifthly, the film's score is delightful and bouncy. Once in your head, it's hard if not impossible to shift. Whenever it plays during the film, I can't help but smile.

Lastly, the finale with Mars and Jackie against Whang In-Sik is exciting and gives us a chance to see Mars do his stuff as himself (rather than as a stuntman). He performs a pretty nifty fall from the top of the cornmill, spinning and landing on his back. Actually, Mars took some considerable punishment for this film. In the part where Jackie lands on him, he injured his shoulders and apparently couldn't lift his arms above his head for four months. Talk about suffering for your art. Of course, the gag needed more than one take to get just right...

So there you have it. Hopefully I'll convert some die-hard DRAGON LORD haters out there, or at least persuade some to take another look at this under-rated fun-packed film.

**Dragon Missile (Hong Kong, 1976: Ho Meng-Hua)** - While it lacks the tight direction of the first Guillotine movie Ho Meng-Hua made, it makes up for it with a great villain and much more frequent action. I suppose I should mention, the titular weapon is used exactly like a flying guillotine. It has a sweet design, basically a boomerang blade that has a dragon-like appearance. Lo Lieh is great as the main villain, and what is interesting and very unique for a Shaw film is that he is also the protagonist.. While the story is simple, it makes for a nice adventurous feel, plenty of action, and even manages to draw a little bit of sympathy for Lo Lieh's cold and murderous Shia Jun. This guy really is cold, he decapitates an old blind woman!

The choreography is simple, but filmed in a way that coupled with energetic performances from the cast makes for entertaining action. Which is a similar style to the action of "The Flying Guillotine" to be honest. One complaint, as it often is with these "super weapon" films, the villain is beat by a pretty cheap gimmick to counter his weapon.. The whole cast is solid, but generally don't get enough screen time to leave much of an impact. The effects are good, as the sparking Dragon Missile rips through the air, and the sets and locations are beautiful per usual.

I probably wouldn't say it is as good a movie as "The Flying Guillotine", which really is a well directed tense "martial arts thriller", but I probably like it equally. Dragon Missile is just a blast of a film, and basically an hour and a half of Lo Lieh running around decapitating people.

**Dragon on the Shaolin Tower (Taiwan, 1980: Cheung Yan-Git)** - aka **Fortress of the Red Dragon; Sacrifice to Desolate Spirits; Sacrificial Contest** - Those evil Japs are at it again as they take over a traditional martial arts tournament in Taiwan and use it as a premise to rid the country of its martial arts masters. Lung Tien Hsiang is the son of one such unfortunate fighter who hooks up with the most respected of all the teachers in Taiwan (played by Tung Li) to get his revenge.

I wasn't expecting too much from this film as I hadn't heard much of a buzz about it upon release but I was pleasantly surprised. Lung Tien Hsiang is one of those guys who rarely gets a mention and never really played in many lead roles, probably best known as the spearman in Chang Cheh's Flag of Iron. Here he gets to take a lead role and really shows his stuff alongside a cast who are largely unknown to me. The film opens with a fight on the titular Tower which has nothing to do with Shaolin but is a really good concept and sets up the premise of the Japanese fixing the contest so no Taiwanese fighter can win. The object of the contest is to get to the top of the tower and capture the flag but when 4 men can enter the competition and 3 of them work for the Japs then you got your work cut out! Plus they have replaced the rungs of the ladders with sword blades and you have to cross a bridge of knives to get to the tower, dangerous stuff. What the Japs really want is for Taiwan's most respected master to enter the contest so they can bump him off, unluckily for them our hero is taken on as his student and so the stage is set for a showdown. First they hire a Manchurian fighter played by the under-rated Lee Keung to stir up trouble, when this fails they try to be tricky, using the kung fu schools big brother and his growing jealousy of the relationship between Lung and the masters daughter. With the pressure mounting and to protect his family and students from harm the master enters the contest unbeknown to them. When he is killed its time for revenge and the entrance of the Brave 7 as they are billed on the cover to complete Lungs kung fu training and launch an assault on the Dragon Tower.

Very little comedy at all, there is the obligatory odd character played by that little asexual actor from Mystery of Chess Boxing. I think its a bloke but I'm still not 100% sure!

The action is pretty good, the AD is credited as Jim Lung who I have never heard of before but he does a good job. There are a few stand out fights, the opening credits where we see our villain with the go faster stripes defeat Chia Kai on the tower, Lee Keung's attack on the school, the second attack on the school whilst the master is away competing in the tournament and the final showdown which sees Lung Tien Hsiang team up with his kung fu big brother to take on the tower and the Brave 7 attack the Japanese headquarters.

There is some blood but not on a Chang Cheh scale, most of the claret gets spilt when the fighters take on the tower, there are some cringing moments as they walk along the knife blades and climb the tower ladders made of swords.

Standout for me is Lung Tien Hsiang who puts in a great fighting performance, the supporting cast all give good acting performances too which helps the film and you have a cast of great stereotypical bad guys, but I always go with the guy who busts the best moves and that's Mr. Lung.

**Dragon Squad (Taiwan, 1974: Jimmy Wang Yu) - aka Four Real Friends** - Jimmy Wang Yu had become, with 'The One Armed Swordsman' and 'The Chinese Boxer', the first international kung fu film star; his natural charisma and on-screen energy compensating for lack of any real martial arts skills. By 1974 though martial arts films had evolved as, post Bruce Lee, audiences wanted to see real martial artists and fight scenes were becoming more stylised. This worthwhile effort shows Wang Yu's ability to move with the times as he gathered together a cast of competent fighters with whom he shared star billing.

Although certainly capable of carrying a film by himself Wang Yu plays one of four heroes (as the title suggests) who come together to face a common enemy. When a case of gold is stolen in transit the surviving member of the escort party, Sung (Kam Kong), sets out to recover it. Initially he turns to his kung fu master, Master Wu (Chen Sing), who unfortunately has developed a drink problem since being released from prison; his crime was to accidentally kill a challenger and now he is wracked by guilt. Wu's friend Hung (Chang Yi) decides to help Sung and enlists the help of conman Sau Pau (Wang Yu) who has happened upon some evidence.

The evidence all points to wealthy businessman Su Ching Fong (Lung Fei) also head of the local crime syndicate. In the aftermath of the robbery Su, expecting some comeback, employs a troupe of Japanese fighters, led by the mysterious Ching, for protection. Wang Yu adds some nice touches to give the villains some depth; Ching has a strange habit of ripping up his fan before every fight but seems to have an inexhaustible supply of replacements in his jacket. Also Ching's men all seem to sport wicker baskets on their heads with slots cut out so they can see. It's details like these that can make kung fu movies so fun to watch (but laughable to newcomers).

Sung, Sau Pau, Wu and Hung spend the best part of the film in a state of distrust especially of Sau Pau who the rest of the group suspect of wanting to find the money for himself. After each of team are beaten individually by Ching they realise they have to face him together, which they do in a well staged and drawn out finale.

There's a surprising amount of character development in this film which does help to make the viewer actually care about the outcome. Chen Sing is especially good as the washed out kung fu master who spends most of the film restraining himself for fear of killing again. Wang Yu shows a good eye for camerawork and editing and adds a nice touch with a slow motion sequence which shows the villain and his entourage walking down the street; really building up the confrontation which is about to follow. The plot is also well structured with enough action to keep the film lively. The fight scenes compare well with other films of the same period with action being shared equally among the four leads. Wang Yu does his usual street fighting style thing (I always find his fighting performances captivating though) while there are plenty of real martial arts provided by the other members of the cast. Altogether an entertaining kung fu movie.

**Dragon Swamp (Hong Kong, 1969: Lo Wei)** - If you are a Cheng Pei Pei fan as I am, this should be right down your alley. Not only does she play the main character with loads of screen time and lots of action scenes, but we also get two of her! She is terrific here playing the two different characters – one a young coltish warrior and the other a much worldlier mature female – and giving them absolutely distinct personalities. Cheng Pei Pei has never looked better either – her smile is radiating, her killer stare is chilling and she is fabulously chic in her various choices of headgear. I suppose she always had her classic film “Come Drink with Me” looking over her shoulder and here there are a couple clear references to it – her broad rimmed hat, her male co-star and an action set piece that takes place in an inn that has strong echoes of the one in her film with King Hu.

Directed by Lo Wei – who made a number of films with this actress in the late 1960's/early 1970's – this 1969 sword fighting adventure is somewhat lightweight and poorly scripted but quite fun with a fast moving array of action scenes along with elements of fantasy, romance, revenge and motherhood. At best the action scenes are only

average – Cheng Pei Pei was always more about looking good with a sword in her hand and an intense stare that could wither flowers - but there are a lot of them and they make use of various implements of death and by the end the body count is fairly high. Only the ending fails to generate much interest as it disappoints with a whimper when the viewer might rightly have expected a grand finale of wholesale destruction with Pei Pei in the middle of it.

In a pre-credit prelude to the film, after three years Master Fan (Lo Wei) from the Lingshan monastery has tracked down the robber of the Dragon Jade sword along with his accomplice. The White Faced General (Huang Chung Hsin) had convinced Fan Ying (Cheng Pei Pei) to betray her order to help him steal it and in those three years they had two children – a boy and a girl. Master Fan retrieves the sword, but the White Faced General and the young boy escape. Not so lucky is Fan Ying who is exiled to the Dragon Swamp for twenty years – a place of which little is known except that it is ruled by a cruel master and no one ever returns. The monastery takes in the little girl to bring up. Jump ahead twenty years.

The girl (Qing-erh also played by Cheng Pei Pei) is now all grown up and has been trained in all aspects of the martial arts but still retains her cheerful girlish outlook on life though she has no idea who her mother and father are. Once again the sword is stolen – it is not all that well protected considering that it has evil powers and should be kept away from people with evil intentions – and the monks are sent out to find it. Qing-erh also goes looking, as she feels responsible for its theft and soon wanders right into the house of the man who stole it – Yu Jiang (Lo Lieh). There are enough such co-incidences in this movie to make you wonder if China is much bigger than a breadbox! She takes on Yu plus his entire entourage and is giving them a pretty good whacking when he brings out the Jade Sword and turns the balance of the fight. Into this fray jumps a man who calls himself the Roaming Knight (Yueh Hua) because he has forgotten his name and he rescues the wounded Qing-erh and takes her away.

The reason he has been roaming quite so much is that for twenty years he has been looking for – yup – none other than Fan Ying who he has loved all this time. I guess nobody mentioned to him that she had been banished to the Dragon Swamp, which would have made his search a whole lot easier and shorter. Strangely enough though that is exactly where this duo decides to head – not to look for Fan Ying but to attempt to get the help of the Swamp Master to recover the sword. They locate the Swamp – though they had no idea where it was – and take the dangerous journey inside – where they see giant lizards running about – I mean prehistorically giant lizards – who have nothing to do with the plot of this film but Lo Wei must have thought it would be fun to throw them in anyway.

After crossing quicksand they meet up with the Swamp Master (Kang Hua) who agrees to help them – not such a bad guy after all – and he lives in this wonderfully luminescent decorated cave and is served by a bevy of lovely females who all seem to be quite cheerful to be doing so – where they come from is left unexplained. After the Roaming Knight leaves though the Swamp Master reveals his true identity to Qing-erh – he is not a he – but in fact behind the facemask it is none other than Fan Ying!!! Cool and she looks just as young as she did 20-years ago due to her diet of Dragon Bladder. Qing-erh doesn't quite figure out though that this is her mother, but the two of them – with facemask firmly back in place – head out to reclaim the sword. Soon mother, father, daughter and son are all reunited and doing their best to kill one another. Family reunions don't get any better than this!

At one point Qing-erh decides to stay over in an inn and one's mind immediately clicks to "Come Drink with Me" and that classic scene. This one is very similar though it is clearly missing the King Hu mystique. She goes in to have a meal and slowly is surrounded by a gaggle of bad guys who eye her up and wait to attack. She tries to eat but such swaggarts as Fan Mei Sheng and Han Yingjie (who choreographed Come Drink with Me though I don't know if he had the same duties in this film) make that difficult and soon she is twirling on tops of tables and taking on a room full of killers – needless to say most of them lay dead by the end. In the film also are Ku Feng as Master Sun and Tsang Choh Lam as the waiter in the inn.

**Dragon, the Hero (Hong Kong, 1979: Godfrey Ho) – aka Dragon on Fire** - So we have John Liu, an exceptionally charismatic superkicker of the old school days who i have never seen in a bad movie. Ever! The only other actor i can say that i have never seen in a bad movie from the old school kung fu movie days is bearded Leung Kar Yan. Now. On the other hand we have Joseph Lai's bottom of the barrel 'Asso asia' film company(Before it became IFD) that has never produced a good kung fu movie. Ever! So what happens when the 2 meet - that is, John Liu stars in an Asso asia production?(Directed by the boss of dross Godfrey Ho). Does Asso asia get one good film in their whole catalogue? Or does John Liu finally make one bad movie? Well the answer is that John Liu's track record remains unbroken. This is actually quite decent

The plot follows the same line as secret rivals, thus, Tino Wong as co-star and features the Dragon lee in a supporting role. Philip Ko who plays the second lead villain and the main boss does a quite decent job of the fight choreography, and John Liu's kicking skills are on full display here. Sure the movie is bad but Ho's direction has injected some amusing wierdness into it (such as when a dog bites the cock off one of the characters then shows it

walking along with a pork sausage in its mouth) And some side splittingly funny english dubbing, like when John Liu says "hm, quite an exotic mover" in such a regal english accent. I nearly pissed my pants when Dragon Lee says to the villain "You are a mad dog that ought to die, wahdaaah" then proceeds to punch him in the gut and he dies so comically it looks like the villain is having a serious epileptic seizure. The real treat of this movie though is the insane finale where Tino Wong and John Liu take on Philip Ko in a secret rivals style showdown.

**Dragon, the Lizard, and the Boxer (Hong Kong, 1977: Law Kei, Ngai Lai)** - I've been meaning to watch this HK-Filipino co-production for a couple of years now. Superkicker Tan Tao-Liang plays a man in Hong Kong who takes a boat to Saigon as the city is falling to the communists in order to look for his brother (played by Meng Fei). He finds his brother and takes him back to Hong Kong. The chartered boat also takes on a load of refugees also trying to flee the country. A typhoon destroys the boat and leaves everybody shipwrecked on "**Dragon** Island," which is home to a bunch of criminals who have a ton of gold stashed in a cave on an island. One of the criminals is a Filipino guy (Ramón Zamora) who's actually the fiancé of Meng Fei's new Filipino girlfriend. The two groups' paths eventually (emphasis on the word "eventually") cross and fights break out.

There's not a lot of action during the first hour, but things pick up a little during the last third of the film. Meng Fei's fighting style is a mixture of shapes and modern-day basher fighting. Tan Tao-Liang kicks with the height and snap that we've come to expect from him, although he only really lets loose during the finale. He's easily the best thing about the movie. Ramón Zamora gets to fight quite a bit, but his punches and kicks are rather sloppy and the latter rarely get above belt level (he's also exceedingly unattractive). There's also a female fighter (Kitty Meng, I think) who uses mainly ridge hand strikes. The main villain is played by Gam Ming/Tommy Lee (who also helped choreograph the film), although he's not really impressive in this particular outing.

**Dragon, The Young Master (South Korea, 1981: Kim Si-Hyeon) - a.k.a Eighteen Martial Arts; Ninja, the Braver; Dragoneer 8** - Super charged Dragon Lee leaps onto the screen for another tale of revenge in this Korean production. He's fighting his fellow countrymen in this one, as he faces up to a gang of killers. There's no shortage of action as Pai Wu Lang(Lee) encounters a group of fighters before he even arrives at the village. None of them are match for Pai Wu as he humiliates them with his superior skills. When he arrives in the small mountain village he's only been there minutes when he's swinging his fists again. He saves the local flower girl Xu Hua from being harassed and makes a new friend at the same time. Lee's character appropriately refers to most of his enemies as fools. The dub job is as entertaining as the film itself. One of the best examples of the funny dubbing takes place when a group of fighters escorting protection money get stopped by a masked man. The man leading the team is played by Baek Hwang-Ki(Five Pattern Dragon Claws) in a humorous cameo. The masked fighter sticks his thumb up then gestures at the floor with it. Hwang-Ki responds by saying "Bastard, Ill cut that off for ya" whilst drawing his sword. The word bastard is often used as an insult in old school Kung Fu flicks. In the case of The Dragon The Young Master it even gets used more than it normally does. The colour blind lackeys refer to the masked man as the silver ninja, when confronted by their boss. Only in a film like this would you get a man dressed entirely in white referred to as the silver ninja. Even the lead villain played Martin Chiu calls his lackeys fools like Wu Langs character does. Chiu has a sense of style spending most of the film wearing a full length tiger print waist coat. Sadly his physical performance is not as flashy as his clothes. He looks far better here than he did in Last Fist Of Fury(1977) but Ive yet to see him in a movie where his Martial Arts skills really shine. Maybe I'm a bit jaded after watching some of the other Korean talents around the time such as Casanova Wong & Hwang Jang Lee?.

Getting back to Hwang-Ki's cameo, he shows off his usual skills, but he's looked better in other Filmark productions such as The Leopard Fist Ninja. When his gang encounter the masked man, its one of the best fights in the film. There's plenty of energy and it has that old school Korean style to it. Sadly a lot of the other fight scenes are not up to the same standard & get ruined by too much slapstick. You do expect this from a Korean production starring Dragon Lee, but its a bit more excessive than some of this other titles. You get the usual dose of odd bleeps and whoops as our hero leaps around the screen during the fights too. The films throw downs are handled by the same man who plays the lead villain, Martin Chiu. He started out like most Martial Arts actors as a stuntman in films like Lady Whirlwind. Having only staged fights for three films, his main speciality was playing over the top villains. He's not the greatest Asian action director but there some standout moments in this film. He makes good use of Phoenix Kim's skills with some nice displays of her kicking ability. Sadly the action is not consistent enough to make it stand out against other Korean old school films of this type.

There's a nicely staged fight where Le Ye-Min's blind character armed with a bamboo staff takes on a gang of thugs. Then Wu Lang enters the the fray and things start to get a bit random. One of the thugs played by Ma Do Sik pulls out a pair of horns attached to a hood and puts it on. Spanish style music kicks in and he proceeds to charge around

like a mad bull. This is a good example of how the action varies so much even during a single fight. Kong Do has a small supporting role and ends up fighting Dragon Lee on a number of occasions. The first time they meet on a frozen lake covered in snow. Like nearly all Korean old school films this was filmed during the winter/ early spring. The fight whilst entertaining at times ends up being a comedy routine with the two fighters sliding around on the ice. Their second encounter on a small bridge is an improvement but still features some odd moments. You don't often see Dragon Lee paired up with an equally if not better screen fighter like Phoenix Kim. However the end fight should have been so much better. Phoenix Kim attended the same Beijing Opera School as Sammo Hung & Jackie Chan. You can see her opera school skills when she executes some nice somersaults in the final fight. Another impressive sequence see's Dragon Lee partially run up a tree then flip round and kick a guy in the face. There's just not enough of these kind of moments to make it a classic showdown. With that said it's still a long way from being the worst finale I've watched.

The film's soundtrack is handled by Ricky Chan who also scored the last film I reviewed in this thread. The music as you would expect is not original with most of it being sourced from the *Hour Of The Gun* soundtrack. Jerry Goldsmith's music is one of the most popular scores used in 1970s/ early 80s Kung Fu movies. They also manage to squeeze in the often sampled Joseph Koo *Fist Of Fury* score. Godfrey Ho again tries to claim credit for directing this one but I think he simply added his name onto the credits. Regular Dragon Lee collaborator Kim Si-Hyeon being the man who really deserves credit for this random movie. The *Dragon The Young Master* is not his best collaboration with the star. For better examples check out *Dragon The Snakes Fist*, *Secret Ninja Roaring Tiger* & *Enter The Invincible Hero*. Some of the same location from those films are used again here, in particular the temple from *Secret Ninja Roaring Tiger*. Anyone not used to these films may find this one a bit disappointing, especially with the grating comedy elements. Most of the best comedy featured in the production is not of the intentional kind. I'd recommend this film to Dragon Lee fans only.

**Dragon's Blood (Taiwan, 1982: John Liu)** - John Liu's last independent project, shot in Mexico. This movie is as crazy as his other independent productions, mixing camels, a Mexican desert, cowboys, and Philip Ko in Manchurian attire. John Liu gets blinded by some French treasure hunters, who are after a golden dragon pendant, that belonged to Liu's brother or teacher, is lost and stolen. Liu plays Zatoichi for the remainder of the movie, doing blind kickfighting, while his real life wife helps Liu train. The movie is a western, but there wasn't enough of a budget to hire Mexicans and bullets, but when will you ever see a Manchurian Philip Ko take on and disarm cowboys with kung fu, and a duel between Liu in Ko in a Mexican desert full of cactuses? Of John Liu's independent *Zen Kwun Do* productions, this is one of the most well choreographed of them, simply because Philip Ko was around to play the villain. Liu's acting is solid, but the budget just couldn't support the talent. This is Liu's most demanding production, shooting a kung fu movie in a desert, with the lowest of budgets, in the most difficult of conditions, and through his effective acting and Ko's presence, really makes this movie fun to watch. Philip Ko is in top form, even in the difficult conditions this movie was shot in, as his kung fu is powerful and very well choreographed. John Liu's fights with a degree of power and emotions never seen before in any of his movies, as Liu was possibly motivated by the difficult shooting conditions. 0.5 for the movie, 3.5 for the choreography.

**Dragon's Claws (Taiwan, 1979: Joseph Kuo)** - It's kind of a pity that *Dragon's Claws* was made in 1979, rather than say, 1976. It has the potential to be interesting and dark, but is compelled to include the usual obnoxious comedy that must have been mandated by law back in '79.

The actual plot is certainly intelligent enough: an obnoxious kung fu sifu (Lin Ho-Nien) is taken ill and it turns out he is suffering from long term injuries inflicted on him by his wife (Yuen Qiu, a former Bond girl of sorts, and later star of *Kung Fu Hustle*), whom he had raped and forced into marriage. Her former lover (Hwang Jang-Lee), now a Ching traitor, turns up to challenge the ailing master for leadership of the school. Their obnoxious son, played by lesser known Lau family member Lau Ga-Yung, generally gets in the way, whilst an obnoxious (notice the trend?) beggar (Pak Sha-Lik) intentionally sabotages the situation by replacing the official *Dragon's Claws* medallion with a fake, thus resulting in Hwang going on the warpath and much death and destruction.

The comedy in question mostly involves the beggar, who is a rather grotesque fellow lacking the charm that these characters usually have. And since the hero is rather unlikeable as well, being stuck with these two (not to mention Hon Kwok Choi as further unneeded comic relief) for a large duration of the film isn't the most entertaining pastime. And don't get me started on the icky urine-collection scene...

Thankfully, Hwang Jang-Lee saves the film. His character shows a lot of nuance and subtlety not usually seen in this kind of film, and has moments of tenderness and cruelty that make a change from the usual smug villain antics.

When he and his cohorts step up the violence in the last reel, the drama is quite effective, and even Lau's clownish antics give way to an effectively furious final fight, mostly redeeming the tiresome mid section.

**Dragon's Infernal Showdown (South Korea, 1980: Kim Si-Hyeon) - a.k.a The Dragons Showdown** - When Lee Chin-Tai's parents refuse to sell their land. They are brutally murdered by Hu Ching-Ta(Martin Chui) and his cold hearted lackeys. Luckily a young Lee Chin-Tai escapes and takes refuge with his auntie. In a bizarre twist, his baby sister is spared by Hu Ching-Ta, and he raises her as his own. Some years later, an adult Lee Chin Tai and his lady friend Shirley, set out on a revenge mission.

Asso-Asia madness and Dragon Lee hi-jinks from producers Joseph Lai, Tomas Tang and Kim Ki-Young. With director Godfrey Ho claiming co-director credits, though he may had nothing to do with the movie other than re-edit it?. Kim Si-Hyeon(**Five Pattern Dragon Claws**) is also credited as the director, it might be safe to say he had more to do with the film than Ho?. Kim directed a lot of Dragon Lee productions, **Kung Fu Fever**, **The Dragons Snake Fist**, and **Last Fist Of Fury** to name a few. This movie follows the same pattern, and while it might not be Dragon Lee finest Martial Arts performance. It does feature one of his most over the top and manic performances. Complete with a soundtrack of quirky noises to emphasize his onscreen moves. Nose tweaking, head butts from all angles, and odd tongue movements are all here. It's as much a homage to the Kung Fu comedy of the era, as it is a Bruce Lee clone movie. The Korean dragon looks like he's walking on hot coals, either that or somebody put itching powder in his shoes.

Tang Tak Cheung(**Tiger Over Wall, The Dragon The Hero**) takes credit for the films comedic, high energy fight scenes. Comedy is always a strong part of any Dragon Lee movie, if it's the intentional kind or not. Here there appears to be a lot more of it, and for some this might be a good or bad thing. It's not Tang Tak Cheung at his best, but it's far from being bad choreography. It's the usual standard you would expect in a Dragon Lee flick, only like I said the humour is more evident. In one sequence Lee Chin-Tai grabs a guy's foot and removes his shoe, he then hits the guys foot repeatedly with it. Not to mention the odd sound our hero makes while fighting, it's a like someone being throttled while making chicken noises.

Super kicker Jack Lam gets a nice supporting role as wondering warrior Lee Chin-Tung. Who has a special rear view mirror in his hat, handy for spotting any sneaky rear attacks. He also carries a cudgel with him, useful for bashing bandits with. It also has a hidden feature, with some projectile string with hook on the end. Which he uses to reel opponents in like you would a fishing line or kite. Baek Hwang Ki as always plays a small time gang leader, out for trouble. He spots Lee Chin-Tung and decides to give harrass him. Only Lee makes easy work of them and doesn't even break a sweat. I was hoping for more high kicking action from Lam. Especially after seeing him in the other Asso-Asia movies **Martial Monks Of Shaolin Temple** and **Leopard Fist Ninja**. Here he puts on a strong physical performance, but for some reason we don't get to see much of his great leg work.

A Bruce Lee exploitationer is not complete without some nunchaku inspired action. The Dragons Infernal Showdown has no shortage of that either. In one of the movies stand out sequences, Lee is doing a nunchaku based kata with added gravity defying acrobatics. When a pair of random thugs turn up to have a laugh at him(**see dialogue at the start of this review**). Before you can blink, Lee Chin-Tai is knocking the life out of the two goons. While one has his head wedged into a fort wall, Lee leaps onto his back and kicks the other guy. It's a unique tribute to Bruce Lee, with some added moves even the Little Dragon never performed. Later in the movie he uses the weapon again, to counter evil Hu Ching Ta's sword skills.

Villains Master Ma(Lee Yi-Min) and Hu Ching-Ta(Martin Chui) both have a special weapon. Which they reserve for only their toughest challenges. Each man has a magnetic sword, with Master Ma having a nice flashy LED light on his blade. Not to be left out, Hu Ching-Ta wears a red medallion on his belt. This medallion flashes whenever he uses the sword, or when he decides to do some sword/bar bending. It's a very random feature of the movie, that reminded me of a another Martin Chui role in **Enter The Invincible Hero**. Also directed by Kim Si-Yeon and again choreographed by Tan Tak Cheung. Only in that movie Chu had an even odder flashing red belly button. Not sure why there was a trend for this in old school Korean movies of the early 80s?.

When Lee Chin-Tai finally gets close to Ching-Ta and his flashing belt, the crazy dial goes up a few more notches. Lee Chin comes prepared with his anti-magnetic palm jewellery. Only first he must get through the many henchmen that stand in his way. This all action finale doesn't quite live up to Dragon Lee's three encounters with **Hwang Jang Lee**. Martin Chui is a capable screen fighter but he just isn't on the same level as **Hwang Jang Lee**, how many people are?. What they lack in swift kicks they more than make up for in sheer physical effort. At one point our heroes belt gets cut, forcing him to fend off his attacker while holding up his trousers. Just when it looks he's about to lose his dignity, a staff brandishing fearless female fighter Shirley(Kitty Meng Chui) turns up. This was first time I'd watched



the skilful Kitty Meng Chui(**Angel Enforcers**) in a fighting role, and she holds her own with the rest of the cast. The pair have good chemistry together, and she is by no means a damsel in distress type character. Shirley is more of a strong spirited and skilled fighter, rather than a wall flower.

*Lee Ching-Tai- Only a stupid fool, would call somebody a stupid fool.*

It's clear this movie has been shortened for the international market. Or maybe edited down by Godfrey Ho when he obtained the rights for the movie?. There's a few jumps in the story, and at one hour, twenty minutes, the film is a little short. As much as I'd love to see a widescreen full length version, I can't see that happening. The English dub for this movie, is done by the same team who dub all the old school Asso-Asia productions. There's a lot of unintentionally funny lines, which is why I added some to this review. There's a shirt that Dragon Lee randomly carries around. He claims its a family heirloom, and its perfectly natural to carry it. Good job the family heirloom wasn't a table or wardrobe. Yet the shirt plays no part in the story at all, at least not in the English print. Then theres the usual gender switching. When Lees love interest dresses just like him, and challenges him to a fight. It's clear Lee Chin-Tai's eyesight is not as good as his fighting ability.

Over all I only recommend this movie to bruceploitation/Dragon Lee fans. If I wasn't a fan of the man's talents, I'd certainly be a lot harsher on this one. In this movie, he doesn't learn martial arts from an old master. He's already been taught all the skills he needs by his auntie, before the credits have even stopped rolling. There's some stunning south Korean scenery throughout the movie. A beautiful waterfall makes a great backdrop in one sequence. Martial Arts fan might recognise some of the locations/temples from **Hitman In The Hand Of Buddha** and **Secret Ninja Roaring Tiger**. Of the Dragon Lee roles I've watched, this is his wildest one. The version I watched was a RO, 80-minute full screen print, released by Digiview. Not the best picture quality, but its more than watchable.

**Dragon's Snake Fist (South Korea, 1981: Kim Si-Hyeon) – aka Disciple of Yong Mun Depraved Monk** - Two schools are at battle to be the best in the Martial World. The Crane Fist School is taking out all other schools that stand in their way at being number one, but they are having a tough time taking out Dragon Lee who represents their ultimate rival, The Snake Fist School.

After watching the trailer for this movie that I posted in the 'Trailers Chamber', I thought it looked interesting, and since I have never heard of it before I'd thought I'd give it a try, It just might be one of those "sleeper hits". After founding out that it starred Dragon Lee, I was even more eager in seeing this movie, I mean I am not a huge Dragon Lee fan to begin with, but the few films of his that I have seen, I really enjoyed.

This movie starts off on the beach, how romantic right? WRONG, we are about to see some kung fu action right from the beginning of this flick. The masters from rivals schools are about to battle it out, and the winner of the fight gets to continue teaching his particular style of kung fu, and the loser must get out of town. The two styles represented were the snake fist style and the crane fist style. Without giving away every detail to this movie like you may find in most movie reviews, I will say for the remainder of this movie, the crane fist school is all about being number one in the martial world, so they try to take out all schools including the snake fist school which stand in their way. That's exactly what this movie is about. For the most part, this movie flowed right along, only to have but a few scenes where there may have been cuts or edited to shorten the movie, which seemed a bit out of place. Very easy movie to follow, a lot of kung fu action, and because of these two facts I will have to say it was slightly an above average kung fu film, just barely.

There were really only 2 humorous aspects to this film, and one came from a bumbling Japanese fighter. He had the goofy sideways mouth when he talked, they gave him the over the top voice to match, and when fighting, acted like he was "invincible" when in fact he was no better then a beginner. He was only in about 2 scenes, and they were both very brief, so really nothing to worry about here. Another smile-friendly element in this film came from one of the henchmen for the crane fist school . When a lead character was talking, he could be seen doing something that made him stand out from the others in the background. Such as making funny faces, shaving with an open blade, sticking a knife in his mouth as if he couldn't wait to use it on somebody, twirling a rope around. At the end he even had a fight scene where he came out as a fire breathing maniac. Before he started to fight, he lit his hair on fire, then quickly put it out. He fought with a lit stick of some sort in each hand, and would blow a flame towards Dragon Lee's way. When Dragon Lee knocked him on the ground and he lost his sticks, he then took the bag he was carrying around his shoulder the whole time, opened it and begin to throw what appeared to be spikes of some sort on the ground. He then did a flip, landing with his back on them and started to rub into them, I guess a way to psyche up for the fight. Just an overall weird character. Other then what I just described, this movie is all serious and not really intended for laughs. Oh yeah, one thing I felt was a bit funny, was when the actors were talking during a few of the scenes, you could see their breath coming from their mouth, and by seeing this I am assuming it was pretty cold

when they filmed this movie. So I was thinking to myself, "I bet we don't see too many topless fighters in this movie" ... lol.

The action in this movie consisted of a lot of kicking. Also quite a bit of open hand contact, and some weapon work as well. A brief one sided swordplay fight, a character using two steel rings, a dart throwing practice scene, a few pressure point paralyzing kung fu scenes, and minor use of a pole. The action was pretty up to speed, Dragon Lee was a kicking machine in this film, he didn't actually actually rip his shirt off till the very end fight. It's hard to say if the action was average or above average, but for what it was, it was at least fast and fun. Although throughout the movie we hear about and we see in action the "snake fist technique", but the actual fighting from the snake fist fighters did not look like any snake fist I have ever seen. I mean they did not fight with the bended hand at the wrist to make the hand seem as if it was the head of a snake, as seen in Jackie Chan's Snake In The Eagle's Shadow. I am not an expert on what the "crane fist" technique is suppose to look like, but it didn't really have any distinguish look to it either. Oh well, still a solid effort from all that were involved.

Another solid effort from Dragon Lee. This "beefier then Bruce Lee" clone really put on a strong performance. He played a character who was humble with his skill. He didn't go around trying to show off to every Tom, Dick and Hung that he came across. He didn't go looking for trouble, trouble came looking for him. He was following his masters orders in opening a new school which he would further spread the skill of the "snake fist style". I enjoy his face mannerisms, and his strong screen presence, part in do to his muscle bound physique.

This one falls in between a "rent first, buy if you like" and a straight up "buy" recommendation. This movie would make a nice addition to any kung fu movie fan's collection, but if you are short on cash, maybe a rental first would make more sense, just to see if it's your type of movie. I for one enjoyed it, and enjoy having it in my collection.

**Dreadnaught (Hong Kong, 1981: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - Bravo! This production from Yuen Woo Ping may well be thus far his best film and greatest masterpiece. The breathtaking action scenes, the exceptional (nearly perfect) cast, the entertaining story - every single element of a mainstream entertainment film is here under the direction of Yuen. It is arguably much better than The Drunken Master (1978) and The Magnificent Butcher (1979).

It is the story of Wong Fei Hung (1847-1924), a legendary martial artist and militia leader of modern Canton, who participated in the Sino-French War (1884-1885) and the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). In local Cantonese folklore, Wong was depicted as a chivalrous hero and in real life he was a master, a rightist, a man of honour and a man of integrity. This is why many local film viewers consider the late Kwan Tak Hing as the perfect candidate for such a role. Kwan, an elderly gentleman himself, was good-hearted, conservative and righteous and some people have compared him to John Wayne.

It is a simple story, about the adventures of Mousie (played impeccably by Yuen Biao), who is chased after by a cruel, maniacal bandit (Yuen Shun-yi). This bandit is being used by a local scoundrel (Philip Ko) to fight against Wong Fei Hung, his top enemy. In order to save his own life, Mousie begs Leung Foon, Wong 's top pupil (played by Leung Kar Yan) to introduce him to Master Wong and have him learn martial arts. In the end though it is up to Mousie who knows nothing but washing clothes to protect the injured old master (Kwan was 75 at the time) from being killed.

The action scenes are simply astonishing (I would even say flawless). Look at the Lion Dance and how authentic it is! First we have the Southern Lion\* exquisitely dancing above loosely balanced storys of 'golden' and 'silver benches', making use of the principle of lever, then we have the Northern Lion\* played by our equally tactful villains who use steel claws and fire to assault their enemies. It is much better than the similar scenes in OUTIC III that even showed Southern Lions being utilized in Beijing! The scene in which Wong Fei Hung uses fire to heal his patient was also a treat to watch. It will leave the viewers' mouths wide open by showing them how limber a 75 year-old man can be.

Yuen Biao and Leung Kar Yan, who are buddies, play the main characters. Leung was surprisingly good in playing a rather comedic character who always convinces Yuen to do stupid things --- such as telling him how to chase after a girl by pretending to be Wong Fei Hung! Veteran actor Fan Mei Sheng is also terrific in playing a rough version of Detective Clouseau in the Pink Panther (look for Yuen Cheung-yan as one of his men). At the other end, the serial killer whose name was White Tiger was extremely cruel and terrifying, exuding a sense of unlimited strength.

Though Kwan only has a few scenes, he is the spirit of the movie. Besides the healing scene, his intricate and subtle fight with the ' Demon Tailor ' (Fung Hak On) was also exhilarating. He also shows a sense of kindness and humour later on. Yuen Biao was also quite appealing as Mousie, a timid young man who is afraid of everything. It seems that he knows nothing about kung fu, however, the skills he uses to wash clothes for his sister (Lily Li) were the essentials of the finger fight.

The image of the killer comes from traditional Chinese opera, however it is also influenced by Western movies like Phantom of the Opera. The final duel between Yuen and the masked maniac was also in a darkened theatre as is the one between the masked maniac and Leung Kar Yan. In the final climax, Yuen uses his cloth-washing technique to

overcome the strange stances of flying sleeves and the changing masks of the killer. The choreography is brilliant, though many may consider the ending to be too violent and bloody. I personally agree that this may spoil the comedic nature of this kung fu comedy.

**Dream Sword, The (Taiwan, 1979: Li Chao-Yung)** - A widely plotted Wuxia with human thoughts, it's not as masterful as it sounds but when enough translates it's worth acknowledging. But personally the narrative style of these movies are still tough going, with multiple characters presented, mentioned and otherworldly matters being the prime focus in plot. Basically the trio of Dream Sword, Hsia Shang Chou (Chung Wa - The Bastard), his student Fan Chih (Lung Fei in basically one of his few good guy roles) are joined by Swordsman Li (Yueh Hua - Come Drink With Me) to shake up the power balance in the Wuxia world. End target for this is the mighty Tzu Yi Chun (Nora Miao) and her deadly, projectile flowers. In the back of the head of Hsia Shang Chou though lies issues of heartbreak and a desire to reclaim love in his life. The design is suitably fantasy-like in nature, with especially the colours amped and the fantastique elements concerning fighting and weaponry are in tune but an attention grabber in the true The Dream Sword certainly isn't. Definitely just another with bursts of high drama skill, the film benefits more when being small in scope and therefore closer to human issues but this remains a sporadic inclusion. Therefore sporadic acclaim. The action is often grounded which is admirable considering the genre and story we're talking of here.

**Drunken Arts and Crippled Fist (Taiwan, 1979: Tang Ti)** - The movie starts out with a kid named Hsiao Hu being trained by a hunchbacked kung fu master (Simon Yuen Siu-Tin, who trained Lee Yi-Min in *Mystery of Chess Boxing*). The kid grows up to be Lee Yi-Min, who's labeled an "expert" by his master, but is given the order to never use his skills to beat people up. Hsiao Hu returns home to find out that his rich father had him spend 10 years studying kung fu in order to use him as a free bodyguard and extortionist. When Hsiao Hu refuses to fight on daddy's command, Hsiao gets the boot and is forced to fend for himself.

Inexplicably, Hsiao goes to the local kung fu school, where he accuses the instructor (Lee Siu-Ming, the film's choreographer) of having terrible kung fu. This being a kung fu movie, the instructor tries to beat him up. In the real world, the instructor would've called the police and had Hsiao Hu arrested for disturbing the peace. Of course, Hsiao doesn't fight back so much as he dodges his opponent's kicks with acrobatic grace, although he does get in a powerful head butt to the stomach that ends the fight right then and there. Interestingly enough, it was established in an earlier scene that his head was strong enough to break concrete, even when Hsiao Hu was doing something as simple as kowtowing. But after the fight with the instructor, that particular ability of his is essentially abandoned for the rest of the movie.

Later on, the shamed instructor sends his iron-headed brother to fight Hsiao, but the battle ends in much the same way. A few days later, Instructor and Iron Head are at a restaurant eating when they fall victim to a pretty female pickpocket (Cheung Siu-Fan) who thinks she can trick the audience into thinking she's a man just because she wears a golf cap. Hsiao Hu shows up at the restaurant and the pickpocket, Hsiao Yen, immediately takes a liking to him. The two are confronted once more by Instructor and Iron Head, and Hsiao Yen gives them a good beating.

Hsiao Hu and Hsiao Yen then have to accept a challenge with those bozos' master, Master Liu (Wei Ping-Ao, the little squirrely guy from *Fist of Fury* and *Way of the Dragon*). Hsiao Yen beats the hell out of him, too, but calls the attention of another wandering fighter, Chow Tao-Hai (Leung Ting-Hsiang, *Cripple Lee Becomes Immortal* and *Sword Stained with Royal Blood*). Chow turns out to be the elder martial brother of Hsiao Hu, but for some reason is bent on defeating all of his master's pupils. Hsiao Hu and Chow Tao-Hai fight, with the former losing big time. Humiliated, Hsiao returns to his master to tell the tale of his miserable defeat. It's then that the old hunchback decides to teach Hsiao Hu one last kung fu style: the crippled fist technique.

*Drunken Arts and Crippled Fist* is not much more than your standard *Drunken Master* clone made on a pretty low budget with only a few recognizable stars. All of the expected beats are hit: old, powerful master? Check. Hero who thinks he knows how to fight but gets beat down by the main villain? Check. Hero who has to learn a new kung fu style in order to win the rematch? Check. Villain who challenges the hero at the end because someone else hired him to? Check. Heck, this film even goes so far as to have our protagonist have conflicts with his dad, although this time around, it's more the father's fault than the son's.

What keeps the movie from yet another tired clone (and trust me, there are lots out there) is that the film runs a scant 78 minutes and the usual momentum-stopping comic interludes always come in the form of elaborately-choreographed fight scenes, instead of silly pranks that only undemanding children would find funny. Even the goofy scenes involving Wei Ping-Ao are fun to watch on account of the cute Cheung Siu-Fan giving him the onscreen beating we wanted him to get in those Bruce Lee films he showed up in.

I'm actually rather quite impressed with the level of skill present in Lee Siu-Ming's action direction. Despite a solid career in the 1970s spanning about 22 films, he only worked as a fight choreographer in four, three of which are pretty obscure films. As far as I know, *Son of Yellow Dragon* and *Snake in the Crane's Shadow* don't have very much

in the way of cult followings. In this film, however, he's able to stage a number of fight scenes with the same level of complexity and elegance as the Venom Mob or the Yuen Clan, at least whenever Lee Yi-Min is fighting. Oh sure, there are a few "Me too!" moments, notably a complex duel between Lee and a trio of spearmen that Jackie Chan had done twice before in *The Fearless Hyena* and *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*. But the bulk of the action is quite enjoyable Lee Yi-Min gets a pretty good showcase. The final battle is a bit reminiscent of the final fight of *Knockabout*, with Lee Yi-Min constantly switching styles (Mantis, Drunken Boxing, Monkey Fist) until he finds one he can defeat his opponent with.

There is some drunken boxing in this film, although it hardly gets a full showcase. Early on, Lee Yi-Min is seen practicing forms while his snobby father is picking a fight with the other men of the village. One of the sets he performs is the drunken gods form, which isn't bad. It certainly doesn't match the famous 8 Drunk Gods sequence in *Drunken Master*, but at least it's there. Then, during the final fight, Lee uses some drunken boxing against Leung Tien-Hsiang, although he fails to defeat him with it. He's certainly more convincing than Meng Fei was, but there's not nearly enough.

More important to this film is the "Crippled Fist" technique, which looks sort of Jackie Chan's drunken boxing, but performed by a person with cerebral palsy. There are lots of butterfly twists performed in this particular style, something that Lee Yi-Min was always good at doing. Much like the drunken boxing, the Crippled Fist only shows up in two scenes. In the first, Lee Yi-Min learns it following a brief exhibition by Simon Yuen. The two have a sparring match with the style that suggests that Lee Yi-Min's character is so awesome that he can learn a technique that supposedly only actual cripples can master, despite not being handicapped in any way. Needless to say it's not very convincing. Its application in the finale is negligible, although it does allow Lee Yi-Min to perform some nice footwork at the end.

*Drunken Arts and Crippled Fist* is a harmless way to spend 78 minutes and comes closer to being a decent kung fu family film than, say, the original *Drunken Master*. Nobody actually dies in this movie, and when drunken boxing is performed, there isn't any alcohol being consumed. There's a lot of solid action in it, which is a must for this type of a film. That's really the best I can say about it.

**Drunken Master (Hong Kong, 1978: Yuen Woo-Ping) – aka Drunk Monkey in the Tiger's Eye** - This may come as something of a surprise, given the otherwise quite considerable breadth of my interest in trashy, low-budget cinema, but I've never been that big a fan of martial arts movies. (Then again, the fact that I've somehow managed to review more than 350 films without ever venturing into chopsocky territory might have tipped one or two of you off...) It isn't that I harbor any particular dislike for the genre, but the idea of watching a bunch of skinny Chinese guys kicking each other in the face for an hour and a half has never engaged me in the same way that monsters and zombies and promiscuous French girls do. But whatever my feelings about the genre as a whole, it's impossible to argue with Jackie Chan. Even now that he's in his 50's, he's an awesome physical performer, a solid comedic actor, and probably the most charismatic action hero the movies have ever seen. He was just as amazing as a young man, and because he hadn't yet established himself as a brand-name in the late 1970's, his early movies never tried to rely on the mere fact of his presence in the cast to catch and hold the audience's attention. Of these early films, *Drunken Master*/Zui Quan is probably the most famous, and it is still almost certainly the best kung fu comedy I've ever seen.

The premise underlying the bulk of that comedy is one that would have carried just about the maximum possible resonance in its native land, too. Though he is little known in the West (outside the hard core of Hong Kong movie geeks, that is), Wong Fei-Hong is just about China's biggest folk hero. A martial artist of awesome ability who lived between 1847 and 1924, Wong is often referred to as the Chinese Robin Hood for his unstinting willingness to use his formidable skills in defense of the downtrodden. The first movie about him appeared as early as 1928, and more than 100 Wong Fei-Hong films have been released since then. *Drunken Master* was intended as a loving spoof of the Wong Fei-Hong legend, predicated upon the idea (and apparently the idea was Chan's own) that Wong, like most people, would have gone through a period of rebelliousness, shiftlessness, and irresponsibility when he was a youth. Its Wong stand-in, called Freddy Wong, becomes an invincible kung fu master almost in spite of himself, only making the jump from good to truly great when he discovers a way to do it that involves as much debauchery as it does discipline.

My favorite thing about old kung fu movies is that they Do Not Fuck Around. *Drunken Master*'s very first scene consists of a fast-paced fight between some guy whose name is utterly unimportant and a universally feared professional assassin named Thunder Foot (Hwang Jang Lee, from *The Invincible Armor* and *Story of the Dragon*). As you might gather from his handle, Thunder Foot is a master of some superhumanly effective kung fu kicking technique, and he makes short work of He Whom We Will Not Bother To Name.

And then, suddenly, it's as though we've moved on to another movie entirely. In some kung fu training center or other, Freddy Wong (Jackie Chan of course) and one of his buddies are clowning around and generally making a fool

of their teacher. The instructor eventually gets fed up with this, and pulls Freddy aside to make an example of him. Bad move there. Freddy's kung fu is far in advance of his teacher's, and Freddy not only kicks the older man's ass, he has time to subject him to all manner of elaborate physical taunts while he's at it. Freddy then heads off with his pals from school for a trip to the market, where he bets one of them a dinner out that he can get the pretty girl who walks by the table where they're eating their rice balls to kiss him. Freddy is successful, of course, via some amazingly sly subterfuge involving a snake and a non-existent "something in his eye," but then the girl's mother (Linda Lin, from *Dance of the Drunken Mantis*) shows up, and picks a kung fu fight with Freddy. No, really! And oh my God, does she ever lay the smackdown on Freddy. Maybe she ought to be teaching that class.

Now that's three kung fu dustups so far, and we're well less than ten minutes into the movie. But you ain't seen nothin' yet, because number four is on the way. After fleeing the wrath of the pretty girl's mother, Freddy stumbles upon that scenario without which no martial arts movie is complete, the brutalization of a defenseless peasant by a gang of kung fu thugs. Freddy, presumably looking to salve his manly pride after having a woman twenty years his senior mop the floor with him, springs into action and lays the head thug out in a manner that had me thinking delirious thoughts of Moe Howard with a black belt. The associate thugs wisely refrain from getting involved.

Next up is the scene that confirms our growing suspicions that Drunken Master is supposed to be funny first and foremost. Freddy comes home, and his father, Robert Wong, tells him to come say hello to his aunt and cousin, who are in town for a visit and whom Freddy has never met before. Except that he actually has met them— the visiting ladies are none other than the girl from the market and her ass-kicking mom! Oh, the hilarity! Robert Wong has just begun furiously planning draconian punishments for his lecherous, incestuous son when his neighbor, Mr. Lee (Ging Man Fung, from *Rivals of Kung Fu* and *Enter the Fat Dragon*), bursts into the room at the head of a gang of retainers. Lee turns out to be the father of the guy Freddie beat up in the market, and neither knowing nor caring that his son brought the mauling on himself, he noisily insists on revenge. Auntie, knowing from recent experience how good Freddie's kung fu is, suggests that one of Lee's men be allowed to fight Freddie, who will not be permitted to strike back until his opponent has landed ten blows. This solution proves amenable to all, at least until Freddie has taken his ten hits and gets to go on the offensive. Lee's bully-boy, far from making good on his promise to put Freddie down with just three hits, has to be carried out feet-first alongside the first victim of Freddie's prowess. "One cripple enters, two cripples leave," indeed.

But Robert Wong still believes his son must be taught a lesson, and so he hires the legendarily hard-assed kung fu instructor Sam Seed to take Freddy on as a student. Freddy panics at this news, and runs away from home. His travels take him to an expensive restaurant in the next village over, where he attempts to scam a meal he couldn't possibly afford from the obviously wealthy man sitting at the table beside him. Unfortunately for Freddie, this man proves to be the owner of the restaurant, and the manager— his son— catches Freddy in his bid to skip out on the check. The manager directs Freddy's attention to a sign on the wall, which I imagine reads something to the effect of "check-jumpers will be beaten severely," and then introduces Freddy to the chef (Bolo Yeung lookalike Lee Chun-wa), whose headband bears the same slogan. Thus commences Drunken Master's sixth big fight scene, in which Freddie gets the shit kicked out of him until a feeble-looking old bum (the great Yuen Siu Tien, from *Taoism Drunkard* and *Snake Fist Fighter*) steps up and starts handing out free samples of whoop-ass. Freddy and the old man flee to the relative safety of the countryside at the earliest opportunity.

Naturally, the old man is really Sam Seed, who has been following Freddy ever since he skipped town, and when Freddy hears that, the result is yet another battle, in which Freddie throws every kung fu style he knows— Panther, Horse, Tiger, Snake, Crane, Monkey— at Sam Seed, all to no avail whatsoever. Freddy is finally forced to concede defeat, and so begins his year-long apprenticeship with the hard-drinking old kung fu master. This, of course, signals the beginning of the obligatory series of torturous training vignettes, broken up every five to ten minutes by more fight scenes. (The best of these involves a man named Iron Head Rat, who practices some kind of weird head-butting technique.) Freddie eventually tires of this severe discipline, and he runs away again. But scarcely an hour has passed before Freddie comes face to face with Thunder Foot (Who? Oh, yeah— him!), who whumps him even more brutally than his aunt had, and then humiliates him further by burning his pants on his campfire and ordering him to "crawl between my legs and go clean some toilets or something!" (Thunder Foot has some of the best lines in this movie. At one point, after hearing that Freddie learned kung fu from his father, Thunder Foot tells him, "I'd say your father is quite useless— I wouldn't hire him to wipe my ass!") Freddie slinks back to Sam Seed to beg forgiveness and resume his training.

And now we come to the real point of this movie. The reason Robert Wong hired Sam Seed to train Freddie was because Seed is the master of an exceptionally powerful secret technique he calls the Eight Drunk Gods. Each god corresponds to a particular element of the technique— several distinct styles of kicking and punching, a stranglehold attack, an extremely strange move that uses a wine pot as a weapon, a pinch attack that can yank out a man's rib if practiced diligently and performed correctly— and Freddie devotes himself to studying them all. All, that is, except the Eighth God, the Drunken Goddess Flaunting Her Body. Freddie thinks that technique is for sissies, and makes only the most perfunctory efforts to learn it. That's not going to become an important plot point in the final reel— no, not at all...

Freddie discovers the final secret to the Eight Drunk Gods when Iron Head Rat comes to Sam Seed's cottage looking for revenge while Freddie is out buying wine for his master. Freddie returns from his errand just in time to see Seed having to fight Iron Head Rat and a friend of his called the King of Sticks (he fights with a staff— who'd have guessed?) stone cold sober, and getting his butt handed to him on a plate. Evidently, in order to wield the Eight Drunk Gods, you have to be five or six sheets to the wind yourself! Iron Head Rat and the King of Sticks (Hsia Hsu, of Thunderkick and The Oily Maniac) return home after satisfying themselves that Rat has been repaid for the drubbing he received earlier, leaving Freddie to tend to his mauled instructor. We have now reached the second necessary turn in the plot of any kung fu film, the defeat of the Good Master, which requires the Good Student to swear revenge. This Freddie does, and he goes to exact it in the very next scene, where he shows up at the King of Sticks' place with a big jug of wine, and leaves with two huge ones for Sam Seed after putting the King's balls in a sling.

The old man isn't home when Freddie gets there, however. According to the note on the table, Freddie's year is up, he has learned all the old master can teach him, and the time has come for him to return to his family. But Seed will always be with Freddie in spirit, and if ever he needs him, the old man will be there. It's a good thing that year is up, too, because back home, Mr. Lee has crossed swords with Robert Wong over the rights to some village land which is sitting on top of a rich coal deposit, and the would-be land magnate has hired Thunder Foot to rub his rival out. Thunder Foot almost kills Wong before Freddie arrives (Sam Seed, true to his word, magically appears at his student's side with a jug of murderously powerful wine) to take the assassin on. But wouldn't you know it, the only viable counter to Thunder Foot's invincible kung fu is one element of the Eight Drunk Gods Freddie refused to learn. Freddie is forced to improvise his own version of the Drunken Goddess Flaunting Her Body, and the movie ends abruptly (after a full eighteen fucking minutes of continuous kung fu!) with Thunder Foot's defeat, leaving the conflict underlying the whole confrontation completely unresolved.

But you know what? Even without anything resembling a real ending, *Drunken Master* is hundreds of times better than just about any American-made action movie you could name— thousands of times better if you want to narrow the field of consideration to just those American films that somehow involve the Asian martial arts. Director Yuen Woo-Ping is justly famous among fans of kung fu flicks, and has even begun to attract a fair amount of mainstream attention in the West on the strength of his fight choreography for movies like *The Matrix* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Even those fight scenes that are intended mainly as slapstick comedy are exciting in ways that few Western action directors have ever bothered to try; it's been said innumerable times by innumerable other reviewers, but the contrast between the hyperkinetic fights orchestrated by Yuen and his Hong Kong compatriots and the static, lifeless work turned out by most of their Western counterparts is breathtaking. Watch *Drunken Master* after something like Albert Pyun's *Cyborg* for an especially stark illustration of this point. The other thing you get watching an old Hong Kong kung fu flick is a strong sense that the creators of these films understood that people watch action movies for action first and foremost. Show me any Hollywood action movie that features four fucking fight scenes in the first ten minutes! Can't do it, can you? It's certainly true that Hong Kong cinema would eventually become just as dull, formulaic, and predictable as Hollywood usually is, but Hong Kong filmmaking on a good day is like nothing else on Earth. *Drunken Master* was made on one of the best of all Hong Kong's good days.

**Drunken Master, Slippery Snake (Taiwan, 1979: Ho Meng-Hua, Yu Cheng-Chun) - aka Ol' Dirty Kung Fu; Mad Mad Kung Fu** - One of dozens of films that were produced in the wake of Jackie Chan's success with his Yuen Woo-Ping collaborations, this one ranks on the lower end of "average" on the quality spectrum. The film is little more than a shoddy reproduction of sight gags and set pieces from both *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*, with an even \*less\* coherent plot than the latter. Simon Yuen Siu-Tin plays Sam See...I mean Beggar So...I mean Bamboo Stick, a powerful kung fu beggar. He saves the daughter of some family from a forced marriage to the local rich kung fu master's son (said master is played by Lee Hoi-San, who played the villain in *The Magnificent Butcher*) by beating him up and killing him via a mahjong tile embedded in the forehead. The rich kung fu master vows revenge, taking his anger out on Bamboo Stick's student (Peter Chan), who works for an escort service. The student is framed for the theft of an important jade ring, and goes on the lam with a laborer (Cliff Lok). They spend the better part of an hour getting into random fights before the rich kung fu master catches up to them...

Some of the fighting, notably those that involve Lee Hoi-san, is pretty good, but nothing special compared to other kung fu comedies of the era. The mandatory training sequences in this are so short and perfunctory that I wonder why they were even included in the first place. I mean, other than justifying one of the film's titles, Cliff Lok wriggling under a bunch of benches doesn't really make much difference in both his fighting style or in the film's entertainment value. Considering that producer Ng See-Yuen had wanted Cliff Lok for the lead role in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, this film stands as a glimpse into how \*that\* movie would've turned out had Yuen Woo-Ping had not convinced him to cast Jackie Chan instead. Yuen Woo-Ping made the right decision.

**Drunken Master Strikes Back (Taiwan, 1979: Barry Chang)** - aka **Peculiar Boxing Tricks and the Master** - The real star of this film is the cockeral that has to withstand being used as a prop during some of the film's fight scenes. When not being swung around or used as a weapon the poor bird is thrown into a cock fighting ring against another cockeral. It's rare that you see such disregard for the well being of an animal during a film and I'm a bit surprised the BBFC let this one through.

The cockeral also allows for some (I'm sure it can't be innocently accidental) dialogue that is full of double entendres. At one point in the film it's pretty relentless with lines such as 'let go of my cock', 'give me your cock', 'were prepared to give you 4000 dollars for your red cock' and so on....snigger. That at least appealed to my childish sense of humour but the whole animal cruelty thing was a bit much to take.

This is pretty much yer standard 'Drunken Master' cash in with a young scamp learning kung fu from an old sifu so that he can defeat some villains. The old sifu in this case though is not Yuen Siu Tien who really only appears in a cameo role and has only one, heavily doubled, fight scene. Despite that though the film is still relatively enjoyable when the actors aren't torturing birds. The action is a little slow to start with but picks up at the end with a well staged climax. Ting Hwa Chung, with all his acrobatics, makes for a decent Jackie 'stand in'.

**Drunken Tai Chi (Hong Kong, 1984: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - Donnie Yen never looked better than in his brilliant debut in another classic from genius director Yuen Woo Ping.

Donny plays Ching Tao a scholar who gets into a feud with the son of a rich businessman, Wong Tao. When a firework fight leaves Wong Tao's son a gibbering wreck he hires a sadistic hit man to wipe out all of Ching's family. Ching, now homeless, becomes adopted by an odd couple, a puppet master and his wife, who are both experts in Tai Chi. The hit man eventually finds Ching Tao and beats him to within an inch of his life but luckily he manages to escape and is taught Tai Chi by the puppet master as a soft approach to complement his hard style kung fu. Ching Tao is now prepared for the final showdown.

I've yet to see a bad Yuen Woo Ping film and this is a perfect example of his inventiveness when it comes to choreographing fight scenes. While there is no actual drunken style fighting (quite why it was called 'Drunken Tai Chi' is a bit of a mystery) there is a clever mix of styles. The film's climax in particular where Donnie mixes Tai Chi with harder kung fu looks impressive. Donnie also gets to show off lots of spectacular kicking techniques in sequences that, unlike his later films, are not over heavy on the under cranking. There's also two standout scenes where Donnie displays some excellent rope-dart style fighting; first with a paintbrush tied to the end of a rope and in the second he uses a metal whip in a fight with Wong Tao. This is classic stuff.

Between the action there are some crazy slapstick comedy scenes that are genuinely funny. The first time I saw this was in a cinema where the film was being shown without subtitles to a mainly Western audience who were rolling in the aisles during the comedic breaks.

Definitely worth getting hold of.

**Dual Flying Kicks (Taiwan, 1979: Lin Bing)** - Wan Tai (Lung Fei) is a mayor dealing in a little minor crime on the side. Commissioner Fung (Chen Sing), his cohort in dirty business, arrives to warn him that the government has sent two agents, the Double Kicks (Dorian Tan Tao Liang & Tan Tao-Chien), to infiltrate the town and expose the crime and smuggling operations. With various crime gangs arriving for his birthday, Wan Tai offers his daughters hand in marriage to the person that can expose and defeat the Double Kicks.

Now here is an odd one. It is fair to say that 98% of all kung fu movie plots are pretty predictable. From the early moments of the film we are usually introduced to the good guy and the bad guy, the actors might as well be wearing shirts with big red letters saying this, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out how the plot will play out. However, Dual Flying Kicks (1978) is a movie where it remains just as predictable as you'd expect but the roles are not as clearly defined. For the first third of the film there is almost no action whatsoever, and the Double Kicks only show up a bit after that. Really, only the last half of the movie has any action, and even then it is hard to route for anyone since they all mostly fall into a gray zone. Wan Tai is not some patriarchal evil crime family head, but a good man dealing with a little corruption on the side, so you don't really want the Double Kicks to bust him. Yeah, he offers his daughter's hand in marriage to the person who defeats/kills the Double Kicks, but he does it all with an air of benevolence. The clans going after the Double Kicks are not especially evil in their motives either, doing it for the daughters hand. The Double Kicks state they really want the man Wan Tai is doing business with, well, to kung fu fans, it's obviously Chen Sing since if he is in a film in a minor/co-star capacity, he's usually the bad guy. And, all this

occurs in the film's final moments, Chen Sing shows up to be the bad guy for the finale, but for the bulk of the film we don't have a clear baddie we wish would get pummeled or a hero to pummel him.

Frankly, despite some moments, this cheapie is not a well-rounded affair. The story is pretty cumbersome, with one of the Double Kicks not very surprisingly being undercover in Wan Tai's family, masquerading as the clownish son of one of his men. As I said, with Wan Tai, Lung Fei (Kung Fu 8 Drunkards, Master of the Flying Guillotine, Return of the Chinese Boxer) isn't drawn as a menacing adversary, so near the end when the Double Kicks are double teaming him, there is no sense of elation of a bad guy, like Pai Mei, is going down. Sure, Chen Sing (Bloody Fists, Rage of the Wind, Revenge of the Dragon) shows up, but you'll just be groaning that he basically briefly appears early and in the middle of the film only to return at the end to be revealed as the "secret bad guy", which is no big secret if you know squat about kung fu casting. There are two oddball kung fu sequences, attempting and failing at some flair, when the Double Kicks confront two gangs- one gang of several men with ladders and chain weapons with a claw at one end and a curved blade at the other, and a gang employing a sorcerer, who animates his kite... I mean, his cape to attack them, before he oddly goes insane and begins to go cannibal on the gang's leader- trust me, it is ten times weirder than it sounds. Mostly though, the skills of the performers are not utilized, particularly Dorian Tan (Boxer's Adventure, Leg Fighters, Hot, the Cool, and the Vicious), who despite being in a film where its title and his character leads you to believe he will be showing off his big kicking skills, sadly, doesn't get to do very much.

**Duel, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Chang Cheh) – aka Duel of the Iron Fists** - Mr. Shen (Yeung Chi Hing), the head of an organized crime family, was on the verge of retirement when he was killed during a celebration. During the attack, his men - including his tattooed godson, Ren Jie (Ti Lung), and a mysterious new recruit called The Rambler (David Chiang) - still got the best of the enemy. But because the fatal fight broke out at a public restaurant, the remaining head members of Mr. Shen's organization - mainly his bookkeeper, Mr. Gan (Chuen Yuen), and Ren Jie's older brother, Ren Lin (Ku Feng) - had to come up with quick a plan to divert police from imprisoning the entire organization.

The plan went something like this: Ren Jie would take the blame for the killings and flee to the south (a la Michael Corleone in the first Godfather film) for a year, then come back when things settled down.

A year passes. As planned, Ren Jie heads back home, only to find things have completely changed. His older brother is now a drunk and no longer part of the gang. Mr. Gan, on the other hand, has pretty much took over Mr. Shen's operation. On top of it all, random people have been trying to kill Ren Jie.

Ren Jie uncovers a conspiracy surrounding the death of Mr. Shen, which involves Mr. Gan and The Rambler. With the help of his drunken brother and his trusted friend (Cheng Hong Yip), Ren Jie sets out for bloody revenge.

Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers can eat their hearts out! The Duel (aka Duel of the Iron Fist) has a lot more stabbing and slashes than all the Friday The 13th and Halloween flicks combined - not to mention constant blood splurts - which can only be compared to Peter North's talent, as far as liquid amount is concerned. The violence is tight and creative: at one point, a knife punctures through a wooden stool and onto a guy's skull, followed by a kick to his head where he falls to the ground. Though the action scenes are swift and fast, keep in mind that they're more like street fighting, than the usual choreographed martial arts moves.

1971's The Duel has often been compared to 1972's The Godfather for its similar themes. Some even say that Francis Ford Coppola stole from it (the same idiots don't even realize that Mario Puzo's novel came out in 1969, two years before The Duel). Other than the story, which revolves around "gangsters" - and the fact that the lead characters are forced into exile - both movies are a world apart. In my opinion, saying one ripped off the other is absurd.

I dug soundtrack. In addition to the mellow funky music that breaks in just before a brawl may or may not happen, we get to hear Richard Strauss' intense "Also sprach Zarathustra," which is a nice touch, but it's a little hard not to think about Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey or even an Elvis concert.

The Duel is a well-paced, action packed tale that won't disappoint. It's the perfect example of Chang Cheh's slickness. It's also one of Ti Lung's and David Chiang's coolest roles together.

**Duel at Black Dunes (Taiwan, 1969: Li Su)** - While he is duelling with Tien Yeh, one of his friend falls and dies letting Tien Yeh desperate. Tien Yeh goes far away with his friend's daughter, who is about 4 years. Later, when his friend's



daughter (Chang Mei Yao, who looks a little bit like Essie Lin Chia) is about 20, they live in a little town where Tien Yeh works as a blacksmith. He is provoked by some rascals who kidnap Chang Mei Yao and he has to fight them. Then, the rascals are willing to take revenge and he is helped by a young man (Frankie Wei).

From what I understood (as the movie is only in Cantonese, it's a little bit difficult to understand the story), Frankie Wei is a friend or a brother of Chang Mei Yao's father and when he discovers that this one died while he fought with Tien Yeh, he wants to take revenge.

During the duel between Frankie Wei and Tien Yeh, this one is the better one and he doesn't want to kill Frankie Wei, but this one attacks him from the back and he is forced to defend himself. Then, Tien Yeh and the girl leave the town and Tien Yeh leaves his sword.

That's a good movie, with good fights and the main music is from the western "The battle of San Sebastian" with Anthony Quinn and is well adapted to this movie.

**Duel at the Supreme Gate (Hong Kong, 1968: Yuan Quifeng)** - By 1968 both Betty Lo Tih's (Le Di) career and personal life were at a crossroad. Her glory days at Shaw were in the past and though still popular she never received her previous acclaim while with the Cathay studio. A year previously along with her brother actor Kelly Lai Chen and director Yuan Quifeng, Betty had formed the production company Golden Eagle which used Cathay as their distribution arm. Their films though were not particularly successful and Betty found herself in the uncomfortable position of having to adapt to current trends by becoming a wuxia heroine in this film and Vagabond Swordsman. It wasn't really a good match for this actress best known for her lush romantic or mannered comic films and she announced in 1968 that she would no longer perform in these types of films and would also drop out as a shareholder in Golden Eagle and would only be a contract actress for them.

Her personal life was in flux as well. After five years of marriage and a child, she divorced fellow Cathay actor Peter Chen in 1967. His extramarital activities had become well known to her and the subject of much speculation and gossip in the media. She received another cruel blow when she lent money to an old friend and actor Kao Yuen and he absconded with it leaving her in financial distress (perhaps partially explaining her decision to sell her shares of Golden Eagle). A few months later on December 27 Betty Lo Tih was dead from an overdose of sleeping pills – whether intentional or accidental will never be known for sure.

Since her death her legend has only grown as one of Hong Kong's most popular and beautiful actresses - nicknamed "Classic Beauty" in her very first Shaw film Magic Touch in 1958 for her genteel composure and her long oval face, prominent nose and beguiling almond shaped eyes. She was born in Shanghai in 1937 during the Japanese invasion and her father was killed in an air raid while Betty was still in her mother's womb. Her mother died when Betty was still a child and she was brought up by her grandparents. Her grandfather owned a Chinese Opera theater and her love for show business was instilled early on. Like so many other Hong Kong stars during the 1960's, her family moved to Hong Kong in 1949 to escape the Communist takeover. She first joined up with the Great Wall film studio in 1953 at the age of seventeen but her career at this studio never reached its potential and it wasn't until she signed up with the Shaw Brothers in 1958 that her career really took off.

In 1960 she became a big star playing the ethereal tragic Hsiao Chien in Enchanting Shadow but it was her role in the classic Love Eterne in 1963 that cemented her legendary status. Love Eterne is simply one of Hong Kong's most popular films ever and her pairing with Ivy Ling Po (who played the male character in this Huangmei opera) was revered by the public. But not so much by Betty who felt that Ivy was getting too much of the credit for the success of the film and that the Shaw's were favoring her. She swore never to work with Ivy again and so in 1964 she left Shaw to work for their main Mandarin language competitor Cathay. Here she had a solid career with films like A Debt of Blood and Darling, Stay at Home but it never reached the heights of her years at Shaw Brothers. She was 31 when she died.

Duel at the Supreme Gate is a middling wuxia at best. It has a good plot but it suffers from a plodding pace and a dearth of much action until the final confrontation. She is a swordswoman in the Supreme Gate clan. One night a thief steals the Golden Sword and the Magic Mirror from the clan and when they track the thief down it turns out to be Kuan Han Pin (played with evil laughing relish by Sek Kin) who sneers at them before badly wounding their Master and doubles the insult by sneering some more afterwards. Bin (Betty) is sent to the Southern Sky clan to obtain a pill that may save the Master's life. There she encounters Chee (a surprisingly middle aged looking Zhang Yang who was male eye candy in many Cathay films in the late 50's) who is immediately smitten by her and follows her back to the Supreme Gate.

There Bin learns not only that the Master is dead but that she is the daughter of Kuan and so is expelled from the clan – though not before she saves their hides by fighting off Kuan's student Tai Yong (a barely recognizable Kelly Lai Chen). She is determined to recapture her place at Supreme Gate so she pretends to join her father and steals back

the Golden Sword (why this is so valuable is never revealed) and the Magic Mirror (basically a bright flashlight that temporarily blinds an opponent). But she is set upon by her father and his Icy Press strike blinds her for good. She retreats to the wilderness to live by herself but Chee follows and sets up house with her - and begins to teach her how to fight blind - she is a fast learner and soon can catch sharp objects thrown in her direction. Word eventually comes that Supreme Gate is under attack and with her cane sword in hand Bin sets out to right the wrongs in the world. As one might expect, the action in the film is a bit clumsy with non-action actors in action roles but Betty has her moments and no doubt she had some action training at Shaw Brothers.

This DVD has been released by Rarescope - a sub-label under the now defunct BCI label but this is still available at various Internet sites. But be warned - don't expect the restoration work that we have become used to with Celestial - the print is in fairly poor condition with lots of speckles and the night scenes are nearly impenetrable. Both English and Chinese subs are burnt on.

**Duel At Tiger Village (Taiwan, 1978: Pao Hsueh-Li) - a.k.a Iron Monkey Strikes Back; Tough Guy** - A Detective and Monkey Fist expert (Chen Kuen Tai) known only as Cool Head, investigates the murder of the emperors wife. Only to uncover a conspiracy and major corruption within the very same government that employs him. He is not alone in his mission & he's helped in the form Chai Fung (Judy Lee), a vagrant with her own reasons for joining Cool Heads cause.

Despite a great cast and some decent fight action, Duel At Tiger Village misses being a classic. That's not to say it's not worth watching if you like your old school independent films. It's hard to pin point exactly what holds this film back?. Many of the films scenes including some of action set pieces are poorly lit. This hinders the viewers experience, especially when you consider the fight choreography to be one of the films stronger points. But there's more to it than just bad lighting. I don't want to sound too negative about this one because I still think it's an entertaining film. In addition this months theme is not to examine why a certain film doesn't quite hit the target.

I picked this film based on the U.K title which would suggest that at least one animal style is on display here. While the Monkey Fist does appear in this production, it's not as effectively displayed as it was in Chen Kuen Tai's superior Iron Monkey (1977). The U.K title is clearly attempting to cash in on the more well known and better made Shaw Brothers production. Still with that said Chen puts on a decent performance as the cool headed detective who keeps calm despite the pressures on him. He does display some nice Monkey Fist techniques in this one but he appears to be combining it with some other non animal styles. There's no monkey like mannerism or gestures often seen and associated with this style in movies. Chen is certainly lacking the physicality he had in Iron Monkey which he filmed the year before this one. He still puts on a good performance in terms of the choreography and more than earns his role as the movies hero.

The films fight scenes were staged by the duo of Chan Muk Chuen (Crippled Masters) and Sun Jing Chi (Monkey Fist, Floating Snake). Both men worked on Chen's Iron Monkey either behind the camera or in front of it. They do a capable job of handling the fight scenes that vary from poor & average to very good. Just don't expect the level of Lau Kar Wing or Sammo Hung. During the finale our hero and his accomplice Chai Fung fight their way down an underground corridor filled with oddities and traps. You can really see the huge influence Shaw Brothers had on Kung Fu films when you watch this picture. Like I mentioned earlier there's not a great deal of animal style on display with only two exceptions. Our heroes style one of which has already been covered. The second is Chamberlain Wu Tai (Chan Sing) who is a master of the Tiger style. He goes up against Cool Head in the action packed showdown in the government palace. Pre to this they have a brief encounter in the forest where we see Wu Tai show off his impressive skills. He rips big chunks of bark from the trees whilst pulling an equally mad face to suit his crazy actions. At one point he uses a tree to catapult himself at Cool Head in a move that can only be described as a flying drop kick. Chen Sing is reliable as always if a little underused but then again I might be biased being a fan of his. His tiger style has looked more impressive in other Fu flicks such as Kung Fu The Invisible Fist. But he still does a good job here with his stiff but powerful and swift open palmed tiger claw movements.

There are many things I have overlooked for this review but I tried not to stray too much from the theme. There are no training sequences in this one with the main hero and villain already masters at what they do. We don't get to see Cool Head taking in and trained up to be a super fighter by a master with taste for wine or opium pipes. Judy Lee holds her own with the rest of the cast in terms of onscreen fighting. Sadly her character is very annoying in the dubbed version I viewed. This can be a bit distracting at times despite her skills. The soundtrack is nothing amazing with the usual music and a brief sample of the Dirty Harry soundtrack by Lalo Shifrin. Well it makes a change to his overused soundtrack from another certain well known 70s flick. Duel At Tiger Village is pretty much average with the last twenty or so minutes being the real highlight. Overall this Martial Arts film is worth giving a chance if you

are fan of the cast members. Its only a low budget Taiwanese production so perhaps my expectations were a little too high?.

**Duel For Gold (Hong Kong, 1971: Chor Yuen)** - Despite the stylish opening with high flying action in the out of focus background and quick shots of carnage mixed in with crates of gold (all glimpses of the end of the story), Chor Yuen keeps matters simple in his story about lust for money. This is not a huge character examination but instead devotion lies showcasing the Shaw Brothers production values with an aura of clarity to the story. Mix that with loud, intense, high flying swordplay that still echoes Chor Yuen's style in bashers like *The Killer*, *Duel For Gold* succeeds at what it does without taking an unnecessary, complex route. Bonus points for some surprising gore and creative death scenes. Starring Ivy Ling Po, Lo Lieh, Wang Ping, Chin Han and Chung Wa.

**Duel of Fists (Hong Kong, 1971: Chang Cheh)** - David Chiang's Fan Ke is asked by his father to take time off from his engineering job to cover for his dad while pop goes to Thailand. While asking for time off, Fan gets the call that his pop had a heart attack. With this comes the revelation of Fan having an older brother. If I might stop my synopsis for minute: the resulting photo of the older brother is hilarious: a pre-teen kid with Ti Lung's anchor / bird tattoos. Anyway, dad's last request is for Fan to find his older brother in Thailand.

We cut to a Muay Thai boxing match between Ti Lung's Wenlie and an opponent. Post fight in walks the associate of Cannon -the Thai Boxing champion- who wants to be Wenlie's manager offering bribes and threats. Wenlie refuses. As he later tells his best girl, he must win the fight against Cannon to help with his mother's operation.

And who arrives to stop this soap opera madness? Fan Ke and his awesome duds. Unfortunately, this film takes a long to time to really click in. Um, what? Sorry. Too busy watching Chiang square off against his soon-to-be-real-life-Sifu Lau Kar Wing. And then watch him one up Ku Feng and his goons. Ha ha... go kick some can, Mr. Fan.

As far as the Muay Thai Boxing, the ritual stretching they do before the fights are awesome. I'm kind of surprised at how much I am enjoying watching Ti Lung perform bare handed martial arts, but my respect for him as a legit martial artist has grown a lot in the in the past few weeks. I wanted to watch Ti, Ku etc. continue to stretch rather than fight. The fights themselves, I admit I zone whenever I see fights in the ring, so Muay Thai boxing is not for me. I will say Lau Kar Leung and Tang Chia's choreography feels gritty and dirty especially during the last fight between Cannon and Wenlie.

I always like watching Chiang and Lung together, and *Duel of Fists* was an interesting "modern" diversion. And I'm not just talking about Chiang's awesome purple and white flares either.

**Duel of Karate (Taiwan, 1971: Fu Ching-Hua)** - When I watched *Struggle Karate* a few days ago, I was treated to a cheap, ugly, drab-looking production with no karate, sloppy fight scenes, and all around badness. I braced myself mentally before watching this one, since it too was a pre-Bruce Lee kung fu movie with "karate" in the original title. What I didn't expect was some as solid and entertaining, albeit far from being any sort of classic, as this film turned out to be.

We open with two guys engaging in a sloppily-choreographed fight on a mountain top, which is definitely a bad omen. Cue the opening credits, played to music stolen from (IIRC) *Return of a Man Called Horse*, which also shows up in *The Drunken Master* and *The 7 Grandmasters*. A few later, one of the masters is greeting his twin sons into the world, when the other master shows up with four Japanese karate masters in tow. The other master lost the duel, but then spent three years learning karate in order to prepare for a rematch. The evil master kills the good one, and the four karate guys slaughter everybody else, including the man's wife. Only the twin sons live, one of whom is taken by the good master's student, the other who is left at the scene of the crime. The former is brought up and taught the Iron Palm technique, which he uses to get revenge. At the same time, another Iron Palm fighter shows up and is employed by the Evil Master...

The movie is basically non-stop fighting for its entire 86-minute running time. I'm pretty sure that the movie is never more than five minutes without a fight. There's one big plot hole that the story leaves open which I would've liked to have known: \*who\* exactly saved the second son and how did the second son learn the Iron Palm technique, if it was his father's signature style? The second son says that he was found and raised by a boxer (re: martial artist), but never goes into detail about who he was.

The action was provided courtesy of Yen Yu-Lung, who worked a handful of obscure Taiwanese films during the early 70s. I actually would like to check out more of his work to see if he was able to evolve his style, since it was a lot more animated and interesting than what *Struggle Karate* gave me. He also frequently worked Taiwanese action starlet Doris Lung Jun-Ehr, so that's Always a plus. Yen actually choreographs exchanges of strikes and blocks, as opposed to the sloppy evasion approach seen in many early 70s basher films. He also experiments with wires, giving the villain a special Superman technique and some truly hysterical "guy gets knocked back dozens of feet" moments. Yes, it's all crude, but it was certainly more imaginative than *Struggle Karate*. Too bad he couldn't get crisper kicking techniques out the leads.

With regards to this film's portrayal of karate and the Japanese, it's surprisingly not as racist as your average Jimmy Wang Yu film or *Fist of Fury* variant. The four Japanese characters aren't a bunch of Chinese-hating bullies, they're just four martial artists in the (Chinese) villain's employ. Karate is portrayed as being a particularly fearsome style, although here it's mainly composed of chopping techniques. That's unfortunate, since as one who studied Goju-Ryu for two years, I know that karate has a wealth of hand and foot techniques, none of which are on display here. Moreover, once the fights kick off, it's virtually indistinguishable from the Iron Palm style the hero uses, in that both sides are content to parry the opponents attack and deliver a downward chop to the back, which is frequently fatal. That makes the film almost worthless as a karate movie, but as an example of a pre-Bruce Lee kung fu movie, it's certainly worth a view.

**Duel of the Masters (Taiwan, 1983: Wilson Tong) - aka Godz of Wu Tang** - Shorty and Uncle are brothers, like any normal pair of brothers they tend to quarrel. Like any normal person in China, they use kung fu, but at a higher level than most people. Specifically they are capable of taking on a dozen guardsmen and making leaps only men attached to wires could achieve. (Hehehe!) In addition to sibling rivalry the brothers desire Pyanee, though the lady seems to find both distasteful, Shorty for his alcoholism and Uncle for the asthma which plagues him. I know you are looking for a coherent plot and I am trying, just remember it's a old school kung fu flick we're talking about here. At this point halt story! The two students have to go and fight a ghost haunting one of the houses in town. At first they only run into a pair of guys who are using props to scare people away, then the real ghost, um vampire, um killer mime, shows up. (By the way, do you have any idea how silly a ghost looks hopping along with it's arms outstretched?) After getting pummeled by the apparition they finally defeat it with Awfei's "Blood of Twelve Animals" magic. (He beat up a guy born in the Year of the Rat and took some blood, then some poor sot born under Dragon, etc.) Forty minutes into the movie we find the real story line, Shorty is afraid Uncle will die of his malaise, but the only person who can help hates the two brothers. There, that's the plot, get it? Not the best martial arts flick I can assure you, but where else can you watch guys settle a matter of honor by wiggling their feet and yelling out numbers?

**Duel of the 7 Tigers (Hong Kong, 1979: Richard Yueng Kuen) - aka Return of the Scorpion; Shadow of the Tiger** - This late '70s film was financed by the Hong Kong Kung Fu Federation and hailed as a showcase for various masters who co-star. They are Lee Koon Hung (the late choy li fut sifu), Chan Sau Ching (monkey), Chiu Chi Ling (hung gar; has appeared in a number of old films as a musclebound buffoon) and Lam Man Wai (a wing chun practitioner who won some boxing tournaments in HK). Unfortunately, besides brief cameos of them doing forms during the opening credits, and them getting creamed by "evil Japanese karate villian" Philip Ko (who steals almost every scene), there is hardly anything to see. And what you do see is not impressive. Lee Koon Hung has a little more to do than the rest, but still not much MA. They do a lot of standing around and coaching the (unfortunate) star, Cliff Lok (Koo Lung). Han Ying Geet (aka "The Big Boss") has significant screen time and does something resembling white crane. Koo Lung won some forms competition in Singapore, but is flowery and not crisp. Amazing that the HK Kung Fu Federation deemed him worthy of starring in a role as "the sole savior of Chinese martial arts". Casanova Wong has one fight scene that has nothing to do with the rest of the movie (he literally kicks Cliff Lok off the screen). The premise could have worked with a more skilled player (a Sammo Hung type) in the lead.

**Duel Of The Tough (South Korea, 1982: Godfrey Ho)** - After a convoy from Canton was attacked and the scriptures from the Shaolin Temple it carried were stolen, one of the monks is found by a young man who decides to help him recover the scriptures. However, the thief turns out to be a former monk who's very skilled and controls a major band of bandits in the area.

Watched this Godfrey Ho-directed IFD production since I'm writing on it for a guest review on Shaolin Chamber 36. It's really nothing stellar, with okay action (very heavy on shapes) and a rather confused story. Add to it a badly cropped fullscreen version that makes some of the action hard to figure out, and you'll get a really subpar movie. What saved it was the lead whom I liked (the guy somewhat reminded me of Chiang Sheng, though not as good in terms of action) and the crazy dub - that dub has people saying "bulls\*\*t" all the time and there's a great delivery from a guy who sounds really pissed all the time.

I enjoyed the dub and some of the action, but it's honestly nowhere near a must-see.

**Duel of the Ultimate Weapons (South Korea, 1983: Kim Chin Yung)** - It's a rather grand title for what is essentially a run of the mill kung fu revenge story in which Hwang Jang Lee plays yer standard bad guy; wandering the countryside and challenging kung fu masters to duels to the death. When he kills some kid's father, the kid learns kung fu from a old master and then comes back for revenge.

The old master is introduced in an unusual way. He's a bit of a Papa Lazarou character who drives a horse and carriage, with an entourage of women, from town to town. He's actually runs a bit of a scam where he sells the women and then returns later to whisk them away onto the next town. All this plot thread really provides is filler, and pretty dull it is too..

The film's saving grace is really the main star and villain; Hwang Jang Lee. Keeping the film alive through the difficult first hour is the various duels he has with different kung fu masters. Choreography isn't that intricate but this is a good showcase for Hwang's kicking skills. Things do pick up quite a bit in the film's finale which sees Hwang throw some incredible techniques, and the hero's no slouch in the kicking department either. Despite some rather uninspired camera work, the abilities of the two leads manages to shine through and just about save the film..

**Duel to the Death (Hong Kong, 1983: Tony Ching Siu-Tung)** - What a movie... The plot was intriguing enough, if a little uninspired and at times predictable. It had enough intrigue to keep your attention, and the acting was on point. Norman Chu put on the best acting performance I have seen from him, and he is generally one of the better actors of the genre... So that is saying something. The rest of the cast did a decent job as well. The generally stunning cinematography, tight direction, and frequent action leave plenty of allowance for the plot anyway.

The thing that stood out most to me was the cinematography. This movie is just beautiful to look at, and even indoor scenes in bland colors are framed in a way that makes them visually pleasing. I wish I could go more in depth on this aspect, but I wouldn't know how to, so I'll assume most who have seen the film would agree with me and "get" me though. I'll make a bold claim and say many of the scenes are what I'd envision one of the classic samurai films looking like if they were shot in color. I watched the first twenty minutes or so dubbed before switching to the Cantonese track. The dub was actually pretty good, but I just wasn't feeling it tonight for some reason. The part with the talking bird "Dragon" was hilarious to me in Canto, and I am curious to hear it's dubbed voice.

The action was well done, but I admit it wasn't \*always\* my cup of tea. While it is certainly ahead of its time for 1983, that doesn't necessarily mean it is better. Bits of well choreographed and clearly undercranked swordplay (and I mean bits) are mixed with well done wirework to great effect. What makes the action ahead of its time is the dynamic camera angles, and they do make it a joy to look at. With that said, I'd prefer to see more "moves per cut", so while I acknowledge it is ahead of its time and entertaining, it could have been better \*for my taste. I have seen the wirework praised and called "the best of its time", which I half agree with. In terms of wire assisted fighting, it is probably the best I have seen from its era.. As far as wire stunts go though, it pales in comparison to Shaolin Intruders to me.. All of the fighting cast handled their swords well, and Norman Chu did indeed fight like a samurai rather than a Chinese guy with a Katana. The standout action scene for me was probably the short cameo by Casanova Wong.. He was awesome and got to do more unassisted moves than most the other fights in the film, sadly, this is probably the most I've seen him in a movie! Yeah, I clearly need to rectify that! One last thing I'd like to mention on the action.. It got incredibly brutal and violent in the last part of the movie, and I liked it! Fingers, arms, and legs flying off, a decapitation resulting in said head flying and being impaled by a tree, it was all awesome.

I really enjoyed this film. I will definitely watch it again, great stuff. This is the first of three films that feature Ching Siu Tung as either director, assistant director or lead action director that I will watch in the very near future.. After seeing this, I am certainly looking forward to the other movies I have.

**Duel with Samurai (Taiwan, 1971: Ching Sheng-En)** - Chen Hung Lieh and Kong Chin Ha play Japanese brother and sister who challenge Chinese famous masters in order to know which are the best martial arts among Chinese and Japanese martial arts. They first kill 7 masters, then a renowned friend of them. Kong Ban and his brothers rescue a girl who was almost raped by one of Chen Hung Lieh's men and they fight with them. Later, three of the brothers are killed by the Japanese and Kong Ban and one of his brothers go to the Japanese's house (actually the 7 masters' friend's house) in order to take revenge.

Kong Ban's brother is killed and Kong Ban is framed by Chen Hung Lieh's sister, who wants him to be her toy. But Chen Hung Lieh wants to kill him and they fight. Kong Ban is saved by his master's daughter (Lee Shu ) and they escape, but they have to separate and Kong Ban is almost killed by Chen Hung Lieh, while his sister discovers where lives Lee Shu and that she is a very renowned master's daughter. While Kong Ban is saved by an old master, Japanese brother and sister kill Lee Shu's father. Kong Ban's master has discovered Chen Hung Lieh's secret technique and he sends Kong Ban to another master who is able to teach him a technique which can defeat Chen Hung Lieh's technique. Later, Kong Ban joins with Lee Shu, her uncles and his brothers and they go to the Japanese to settle the scores. A great movie, a great Kong Ban, a great Chen Hung Lieh, Lee Shu and Kong Ching Ha are very good...what else to ask?

**Duel With The Devil (Taiwan, 1971: Kim Lung)** - A simple enough Wuxia tale, detailing the different sides of two swordsmen both known as Devil. One is the baddest of the bad and the object of revenge for Yu Shuang. One is a noble warrior wanting fair fights but naturally forces go after him by mistake. Forces also connected to the 5 Tiger Fortress. Further secrets revealed has notions of revenge being conflicted and confusing ones...

Not as packed story- or character-wise as you would expect, when director Kim Lung (The Ringing Sword) highlights the more limited set of characters set in and around the two devils, the package is a nice, small action-oriented experience. Especially notable since the action, while fairly heavy on Wuxia techniques, strikes a chord by being grounded and fairly powerful even. Basically any additional plot or featured characters ring of incoherence instead but out of the films Fusian unearthed, *Duel With The Devil* is one of the strongest.

**Duel with the Devils (Taiwan, 1977: Lin Pai)** - Ling is a man beset by enemies on all sides in "Duel with the Devils". The movie begins with him discovering the bodies of his slain son and father and the realization that his wife has been carried off by the killers. It ends with him leaping for his life from top of a flaming pagoda. For the hour or so that separates these scenes he fights against the Japanese occupiers of his homeland and their Chinese collaborators, picking up some valuable (and attractive) allies but also facing treachery and betrayal.

All roads lead to the pagoda, on obviously alien structure in the Chinese countryside. The remains of Ling's wife are on an altar at the top of the pagoda and on each level on the way up he encounters someone who tries to stop him. These foes are a multi-ethnic and variously talented group. The first is a Caucasian in a ruffled shirt, an expert fencer armed with a rapier who is left muttering about "Chinese Kung Fu." Next are two muscular wrestlers, obviously Asian but of no obvious origin—nor would any country want to claim these two, who are strong, fast and very stupid. They end up in a very awkward and embarrassing position. On the third level is a South Asian fighter with a whip and a handful of throwing daggers—as soon as the daggers come out we know that at least one of them will wind up buried in him. Before he can get to the top level Ling encounters some trip wires and booby traps, with huge stones falling from the ceiling and hatchets flying through the air.

Finally there is a Japanese swordsman, an opponent who seems as tough and resourceful as Ling and who comes closer and closer to a killing blow with his weapon. Ling dispatches him with a very unlikely weapon, one that will have to be seen to be believed. When he reaches the altar with the ashes (which have been treated very respectfully by the Japanese) he is confronted by a ju-jitsu expert who defeats him and throws him from the pagoda. Ling catches a desperate handhold and scrambles back. He is facing his final defeat when he sees a vision of his wife, gains strength from the sight and beats his final opponent.

And then the fire breaks out....

There are a lot of well choreographed fights in "Duel with the Devils". Before he gets to the pagoda skirmishes Dorian Tan Tao-Liang spends most of his time fighting, preparing to fight or recovering from a fight. He is aided by Angela Mao Ying, elegant and athletic and able to drop any man with one well placed kick to the head. She was the main reason I got this disc and while she isn't the star she is featured and has enough screen time to leave a few score bad guys lying on the ground.

There is no question of the identity of the devils in the title. Ox, played by Cheng Fu-Hung, becomes Ling's follower in order to "kill all the Japanese and the Chinese who work with them" at least according to the dub on this release which seems to convey the spirit of things. The Japanese, all of whom wear kimonos and sandals with white stockings or army uniforms, take what and whom they want from their reluctant hosts. They go out of their way to humiliate the Chinese—there is the almost obligatory scene of a gang of them walking through a crowded street shoving aside anyone in their path and smashing anything they can reach while the citizens cower in fear. They are guilty of everything from petty theft to summary execution and provide plenty of targets for the martial arts talents of Dorian and Angela.

One theme that was introduced and then abandoned involved equating the Japanese with the British in the 19th century. Like the British, the Japanese were using opium to help control the Chinese population but other than a few scenes in an underground hellhole complete with bubbling cauldrons and Japanese overseers whipping Chinese slave laborers it didn't go anywhere. It did use a very well designed and stark set that showed the complete degradation of the Chinese laborers.

The scenes in the pagoda go on for too long—Ling rolling away from the crack of a whip is only interesting for a short time, for example, and the two wrestlers should have been dealt with in half the time it took. Watching muscle-bound brutes act dumb is something that a many U.S. residents like to do on Sunday afternoon but it is pretty boring in a martial arts film. There are a few interesting scenes before that. One is a fight which pits Ling, Ox and Angela Mao's character against what seems to be a battalion of sword wielding Japanese. The fight takes place on a train and a Pullman car has the perfect dimensions to accommodate the "line up and get kicked or punched one by one" school of action choreography.

A strange one is the recognition scene between Ling and his wife. After being kidnapped she has become the consort of a particularly slimy Japanese official, something which she obviously regrets but which she has to do in order to stay alive. The scene is strangely shot and cut. Ling, covered with blood having cut his way through half the palace guard, bursts into a dinner party with entertainment. She is astonished to see him which makes sense. He is just as surprised, which makes no sense at all since he has spent most of the movie until then looking for her and has been told just minutes before exactly where to find her. There surprise is indicated by jump cuts (a lot of jump cuts) between the two of them interspersed with zooms in on each of them. Looking surprised for a length of time was not in the acting repertory of Dorian Tan Tao-Liang when "Duel with the Devils" was shot.

Recommended for the almost non-stop action, especially those parts with Angela Mao.

**Dynamite Shaolin Heroes (South Korea, 1978: Lee Hyeuk-Su)** - Man, I love this movie. It is said to be directed by Godfrey Ho, but I'm sure he just had some Korean fella direct (it's a Korean production, filled with Korean actors) and he slapped his name on it! Anyway, the story is pretty good, it basically mixes three somewhat generic plots together, to make one pretty good plot! Your typical qing officials are after a list of rebel names, theres a love triangle, and a disguised hero which is what for the most part ties the plots together. The acting starts off bad, but ends up being pretty good, although the dub is admittedly terrible. I can't really comment on if the reveal of the Lotus Man is well done or not as I have seen it before.. But I remember kind of knowing the first time around, but they give you just enough to doubt what you think.

Kwan Yeong Moon and Lo Lieh would be your main stars I guess, backed by Kwan Il So, and a bunch of other unknown Koreans who kick well! The rest of the known cast are mainly non-fighting roles, and act fairly well. Kwan Yeong Moon puts in a solid performance.. While it isn't one of his best, it's a pleasure to see him as a good guy and on screen for the majority of the film. His acting starts off bad, but ends up decent by the end of the film.. More importantly, he gets to pull off plenty of kicks. Lo Lieh is good and reliable as usual, and puts in a decent fighting performance, although he's double for a few acrobatic feats. They're two of my favorite old school actors, so it's a big part of why I'm such a fan of the movie.

The fighting is above average overall. I wish I could get the names of some of these other Korean guys. Particularly the guy with the pink headband, he had some serious intensity, and kicks! The fights mainly consist of who I'm assuming is Kwan Yeong Moon most of the time, kicking the shit out of people...and that's fine by me, as there isn't enough of this around! There was or scene that was pretty neat to me, while two people fight, the camera will be close behind one of them, as you see the others strikes coming at, hitting, or going past, and they change positions a couple of times to where the others back is "against" the camera... I thought it looked good, and it felt like something you'd see in a 90s MA flick (which I admittedly have limited knowledge of). This is during a fight between KYM and Kwan Il So which is one of the better of the movie. The finale is good and takes place at a beach, and in the ocean.

Anyway, this movie is filled with cool stuff to me. The soundtrack is used to great effect in tandem with what's going on in the movie, villains/heroes arriving, "happy" moments, etc. The "Lotus Man" is ridiculous but awesome as a sort of kung fu superhero. There are also some beautiful and less often seen locations (as it was filmed in Korea, I take it). There are tons of masked lackeys, particularly strange are the ones who wear a mask that is shaped just like a KKK hood...no better way to describe it.

Anyway, it has it's flaws, and I don't expect many, if any, to like it as much as me.. But it's definitely worth a watch, and a fun movie. There are of course plot holes, some obvious characters may be doubled often, but I assume they aren't. I'd go as far as to say it's decently directed, and it surely isn't directed by Godfrey Ho, haha.

In closing, a good dub quote from the movie: "You shouldn't use the flower of peace as a symbol if you're going to kill and take lives"...

"I don't use it as a symbol to take lives, I'm saving lives!" - Lotus Man.

**Dynamite Trio (Hong Kong, 1982: Danny Cheng)** - aka **Long Step Mantis** - Mark Long stars as the Mantis Fist Master who sends his student out to look for his secret martial arts book containing techniques so powerful that should it ever fall into the wrong hands the consequences would be disastrous for the martial arts world. And 'wrong hands' are certainly looking for it in the shape of Lung Fei (always a good villain) who is prepared to kill anyone standing between him and the book; as demonstrated in the films introductory scene where two of the Mantis Fist Master's students, entrusted with the book, are attacked with only one barely escaping with his life.

The book eventually finds its way to the young son of a pharmacist who has been forbidden from learning kung fu by his father (as usual) and whose attempts at joining the local kung fu school have ended in rather nasty beatings. Jacky Chen instead turns to the book and in a remarkably short space of time becomes proficient in mantis style kung fu. It isn't long however before the villains and all interested parties finally track down the book, leading to the fight filled climax.

After an impressive opening credits in which we see Mark Long practice his wonderful mantis fist technique, the film wastes no time in getting stuck into the action. The pace is maintained throughout the film and you are literally never more than 5 minutes away from a fight scene. With so much action its surprising that they actually managed to squeeze in such an interesting plot. The fight choreography is brilliantly executed by all members of the cast. Lung Fei makes for a quality villain but it's the mantis fist stylings of Mark Long and Jacky Chen that will hold your attention. Standout moments include a fantastic three on one staff fight near the start of the film and the excellent three on two showdown is classic kung fu.

**Dynamo (Hong Kong, 1978: Hua Shan)** - The most famous Bruce Lee imitator was a chap from Taiwan named Jimmy Ho Chung-Tao, who would make quite a few films under the moniker Bruce Li. Bruce Li (as I'll be referring to him during the review) was trained in wing chun, the style of kung fu that the real Bruce Lee originally trained in, and, with the right lighting and camera angles, could look reasonably like Bruce Lee (or at least like a cousin or something). Unfortunately, like most other Bruceploitation films, his films were often plagued with low budgets, untalented action directors, bad acting, and scenes that exploited women.

Despite all this, one of the fascinating things about Bruce Li's career was how much of it was devoted to Bruce Lee himself. Bruce Li starred in quite a few biopics of the Man, including *Bruce Lee: A Dragon Story*; *Story of the Dragon*, which proposes that Bruce Lee founded Jeet Kune Do to defeat legendary superkicker Hwang Jang Lee; *Bruce Lee: The Man, the Myth* (which proposed that Bruce Lee got into multiple fights every day of his life); and a few others. However, not content to just appear in Bruce Lee biopics, Bruce Li also starred in a number of films set in alternate universes following Bruce Lee's death, including *Exit the Dragon*, *Enter the Tiger* and *Bruce Lee, We Miss You*. This film also falls into that category, and promises a film about what's it's like to be a Bruce Lee imitator. Unfortunately, it doesn't follow through on the promise and favors just a bunch of random fight scenes.

Bruce Li plays Lee Ting-Yee, a wing chun student and cab driver in Hong Kong. He's a promising martial artist who's about to get a big break in the wake of Bruce Lee's death. One day, Lee Ting-Yee gets into a fight with a bunch of carjackers, which fight is witnessed by a female movie producer and her talent manager. Impressed with his skills and his supposed resemblance to Bruce Lee, they hand him a contract to be an actor and, from what I understand, ring fighter as well(!)



So Lee Ting-Yee quickly becomes a sensation in the Hong Kong movie industry. However, his kung fu still needs a bit of work, so Lee's manager hires an alcoholic kung fu master (Ku Feng, *Avenging Eagle* and *New One-Armed Swordsman*) to further Ting-Yee's training. At first they really resent each other, since, like most kung fu masters, the training often comes across more as torture than anything else. However, Ting-Yee eventually learns to respect his new master.

While all this is going on, the Cultural Company, a rival talent agency to the one Ting-Yee is working for, is coming on hard times. Upset at their losses in the wake of Lee Ting-Yee's rise to fame, they decide to put an end to him, sending out hired killers to murder him on a number of occasions. This leads to a fight during filming, a fight at a hotel, and a fight on a snowy mountain outside of Seoul, Korea. Finally, the Cultural Company simply kidnaps Ting-Yee's dance instructor girlfriend and gives him an ultimatum: He has to lose in the ring fight that he'll fight in Chicago in a few weeks. If not, she'll die.

Yeah, like I said, the film really should've focused on the REAL dangers of being a martial arts star and the feelings of someone who was hired to imitate the best in the business. After all, Jimmy Ho Chung Tao was not really a fan of his Bruce Li image and has said so numerous times in interviews. To have a film about him struggling to create his own style instead of mimicking that of another would've been more compelling. Unfortunately, the whole kidnapping and attempted murder subplots really turn a film about a chopsocky actor into just another chopsocky film.

There are a number of other subplots that really don't add a whole lot to the movie. The most notable is the affair that Lee Ting-Yee has with a French actress named Angie. Their "relationship" was originally put into papers by his producer for extra publicity, and puts Lee's relationship with his dance instructor girlfriend in jeopardy. But nothing is really done with the whole bit and it seems to have been put in the script mainly as a way to put female nudity into the film (although the version I saw cut it out). There's also another subplot involving a conflict between Ku Feng's character and some thugs, but it doesn't add anything to the film.

Thus, with a plot that doesn't deliver what it promises, the mainly reason to see this film is to see the fight sequences, which were choreographed by Yuen Cheung-Yan (*Charlie's Angels* and *Daredevil*). Most of the fights are played as complete fights from the films he makes, or are fights that stem from the assassination attempts. The fights are a mixed bag. They certainly are numerous, but quality-wise they seem to fluctuate from pretty darn good to kind of sloppy. A lot of fights kind of go for that mannered, too-traditional style of fighting that's perfectly fine in period pieces, but out of place in a (pseudo) real world context.

There are two dojo fight scenes that are really the highlight of the film, as is the final fight between Bruce Li and a big Caucasian karate fighter. There are a number of sparring matches between Bruce Li and Ku Feng that are also fairly well done. Bruce Li furnishes some of his better screen fighting and his kicks are a lot better than usual, plus his wing chun's strong and he gets to some more acrobatic moves that are nice to look at. I guess that in and of itself is reason enough to watch this movie.

As Brucesploitation films go, this one isn't all that bad. It has pretensions of being more than just your garden variety Bruce Lee imitator film, but doesn't trust its own premise enough to deliver on it. Nonetheless, there are enough quality fight scenes to make it worth a rent.

**Dynasty (Taiwan, 1977: Chang Mei-Chun)** - aka **Super Dragon; The Ming Dynasty** - Back in 1967, Han Ying-Chieh and celebrated director King Hu worked together on *Dragon Gate* a tale of righteous swordsmen taking on a vicious, corrupt Eunuch during the Ming Dynasty. While not an official follow-up, the masterpiece *A Touch of Zen* took on the same themes, with both men working behind the camera (and in Han's case, in front of it as well). *Dynasty* was made in 1977 at the tail-end of Han Ying-Chieh's career. Although missing the influence of King Hu in the director's chair, the film feels like a closing entry in an unofficial trilogy of movies about corrupt Ming Dynasty eunuchs.

The plot here is quite simple: Eunuch Tsao (Pai Ying, who worked with Han in both *Dragon Gate Inn* and *A Touch of Zen*) is your average power-hungry eunuch, who has perfected his kung fu to the point he is nearly invincible (a sort of template to similar characters in 1990's *The Swordsman* and 1992's *New Dragon Inn*). He's after Prince Chu, an heir to the emperor's throne who'd like nothing more than to curb the power of eunuchs in general. When Prince Chu goes into hiding at the Shaolin Temple, the abbot, knowing the Tsao will break the universally-accepted sanctuary law, sends his best fighter, Tan Sau-Chin (Dorian Tan Tao Liang, who worked with Han in films like *Tornado of Pearl River* and *General Stone*), to kill the eunuch.

*Dynasty* has the feel of a production that people actually threw money at, despite being made in Taiwan. There are lots of sweeping shots (at least in the beginning) of dozens of Ming Dynasty guards on horseback travelling across

the country or through town. There are some ambitious set pieces that show that the filmmakers were trying for something big, to greater or lesser effect.

Storywise, this actually feels more like Pai Ying's film than, Dorian Tan's, despite his being the protagonist. It takes almost 40 minutes for the film to focus on Tan, and even then, his character is portrayed as the sort of ghost-like assassin who's content to hide among the shadows and instill fear in his victims, rather than your average kung fu hero who'll jump into any fight with a large group of opponents at the drop of a hat. One set piece is actually played as a horror movie, with two lead villains watching in horror as their men get picked off one by one by an unknown (to them) entity.

On the other hand, Pai Ying is the focus of the movie since minute one, and we get to see the decisions he makes that ultimately lead to his downfall. Compare with *New Dragon Gate Inn*, where the evil Eunuch is played more like the looming presence, the guy whom we know is on the way, but whom we don't see very much of until the end itself.

The most innovative aspect of the action is that it was filmed in 3-D. So throughout the film, we have objects being shoved into the camera: swords, spears, logs, arrows, pottery, flying people, and more! Sometimes it's pretty cool, but more often than not, it turns out to be distracting and disrupts the flow of the action. Once in a while, the effect is just downright bizarre, leading to weird phallic imagery when people repeatedly jab tree trunks and *OUATIC2*-esque cloth cudgels into the camera.

Making a wuxia film with Dorian Tan in the lead is a questionable idea, since the guy is first and foremost a superkicker, his abilities to wield weapons onscreen being limited at best. His kicks are often underplayed here, and the few times he gets to use his patented hop kicks, the coolness is spoiled by an obnoxious 3-D effect. For most of the film, he fights using an umbrella made out of adamantium (with a sword hidden in the handle). There are some cool moments with the umbrella, but most of the time a general feeling of sameness hangs over Tan's fight scenes. The best fight has him taking on a bunch of assassins, several of them who are armed with flying guillotines(!).

Han Ying-Chieh, who helmed the action here, seems to be stuck in 1970 with the action. The fights are played out at normal speed, and often feel slow. The hand to hand combat feels all too generic, at a time when Lau Kar-Leung, Sammo Hung, and Yuen Woo-Ping were well on their way to revolutionizing onscreen action in films like *Executioners from Shaolin*; *The Iron-Fisted Monk*; and Yuen's collaborations with John Liu and Hwang Jang Lee. The swordplay often feels more like a Hollywood swashbuckler, without the complexity or grace of the films the Shaw Brothers were making at the same time. But then, with Tan Tao-Liang miscast in the role of a powerful swordsman, it was inevitable that this would happen. There are lots of super jumps (people jumping from trees and roofs played backward) and some crude flying effects. The final duel, much like Pai Ying himself, feels like the template for the crazy wuxia films that we'd see in the 1990s (but obviously without the giddy energy those films had).

*Dynasty* is ultimately little more than a curio. Plotwise, it makes a good compliment to Han Ying's collaborations with King Hu, and had it been made before 1974, it would've been a rather impressive film indeed. But Han Ying Chieh was simply unable to evolve his craft at the same rate of his peers, especially his protégé Sammo Hung. So in the end, we have some good action ideas, an interesting take on the typical evil eunuch formula, but not enough to make the film really stand out.

**Eagle vs Silver Fox (South Korea, 1982: Park Yun Gyo)** - *Eagle vs. Silver Fox* was also a Godfrey Ho film, if you go by the credits. I've heard some people claim that a lot of Hwang Jang-Lee's Korean films were made by other people, and then that unscrupulous trifecta of tripe, Godfrey Ho, Joseph Lai, and Thomas Tang, picked up the film for international distribution and pasted their names on the English credits. If that is indeed true, then they really need to go to hell, as it makes them worse than those guys at Xenon who tried to market some obscure 1970s kung fu movie as the 1990s Michelle Yeoh film *Holy Weapon*, among other marketing atrocities.

Oh, the movie...I was getting there.

We open with a monk traipsing through some random forest when he's suddenly confronted by the evil Manchurian warlord, Silver Fox (Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee). Said monk isn't actually a monk, but a messenger heading for the south. I'm not sure when this film takes place, but I'm going to assume it's somewhere between the fall of the Ming Dynasty and the start of the Qing Dynasty, despite a budget low enough that the filmmakers couldn't afford cheap hairpieces for the actors involved. In any case, I'm assuming that the Qings are pushing their influence southward and whatever the messenger is carrying, it'll probably serve as an impediment to the Manchurian manifest destiny. So Silver Fox beats the man to the death in what turns out to be the film's best

fight.

The film jumps to the Shaolin Temple, where another group of rebels are being prepped to take a message to the south. Unfortunately, the group is ambushed at the docks and everybody but Lee Tso (Mario Chan, *The Last Fist of Fury* and *Bruce Against the Odds*) is murdered. Lee himself is stabbed several times, but he falls into the water and is rescued by a monk. The monk teaches Lee the "Flying Fist Style," after which he conveniently dies of pneumonia or some other respiratory disease that had been affecting him for months/years.

So now Lee Tso is wandering around the countryside, an arrogant and cocky fighter in the same vein as Jackie Chan's character from *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, minus the likability. While visiting a local restaurant, he gets into a fight with one of the men who had led the ambush and embarrasses him real good. This earns him the attention of two people: a cross-dressing female thief (Sit Chi-Lin) and another old monk (whom I think is Chui Miu-Hung of *Naked Comes the Huntress*). FemThief (as I'll call her) quickly takes to the arrogant prick that is our hero and the two start their wanderings around, eventually coming into contact with the monk, who's the master of beating people with a wooden spoon.

Our two heroes come into conflict with a second member of the ambush squad and FemThief gives him a good thrashing. He meets up with the guy who got beat up in the restaurant and they call upon their third brother (*Leopard Fist Ninja's* Gam Yau-Hung) a rather hefty bald guy. Yet another fight breaks out that results in the death of the first two baddies, causing Bald Guy the First (there's a second bad baddie in the movie) to go running back to the Silver Fox. Silver Fox sends some men over to the old man's hut in order to wipe all three of our heroes out.

It's at this point that we learn that FemThief is the daughter of another rebel and was apparently betrothed to Lee Tso. After the whole "You don't want to marry me because I might die" argument, the two decide to get married with the monk's blessing. It's a private affair, made rather humorous by a scene in which the monk leaves the house at night, goes to a window, and comes *this* close to poking a hole in the paper structure and peeping on the lovebirds. Lecherous bastard, that monk is. He decides against it, thankfully sparing us the audience a glance of what a Mario Chan sex scene would look like (probably nothing pretty), and heads into the forest. While in the forest, a couple of men armed with butterfly swords show up, leading a Tex Avery style fight scene in which the Monk beats the hell out of them while doing everything possible to keep them from screaming in pain.

The next day, Lee Tso sets out for Silver Fox's palace, meeting up with the two bald baddies (Bald Man the Second is played by Chiu Chun, who played one of the Ting brothers in *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*). After defeating and killing them, all that's left is Silver Fox; Monk and Mrs. Lee Tso can take care of Silver Fox's men just fine. As would be expected, Silver Fox is a far better fighter than Lee Tso, but he ends up getting tripled-teamed, two of which fighters use weapons to trap him. So yeah, the final fight is extremely unfair and short, even by the standards of a genre in which double-teaming the main villain is pretty standard hero procedure.

*Eagle vs. Silver Fox* is an extremely forgettable kung fu movie, despite the presence of Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee. It's so unremarkable, in fact, that all I can really remember from it are Hwang's fights and the wedding night bit. I watched the film three nights ago and I've since forgotten how the two heroes met up with the second villain (Future Cop Guile: It was at a bridge where FemThief gets wet and it becomes apparent that she's a woman...sorry guys, nothing salacious in that scene, though). The movie hits all of the expected beats for a film like this and does nothing new in any department. The action is okay, although the only fighters who stand out are Hwang (natch!) and the guy who plays the first villain in the restaurant, whose kicks are pretty good. Mario Chan is okay, although he occasionally dips into Jimmy Wang Yu-level arm flailing, plus he commits cardinal sins of letting his guard down whenever he throws a kick. There's some strange bit with the monk swinging a pole and knocking people backward, even though the weapon doesn't even *come close* to making physical contact with them. I should also point out that Hwang training scenes are taken from another movie (notice the disappearance of his goatee in these sequences), probably *Five Fingers of Steel*, which Hwang also choreographed. Hwang proves to be an adequate choreographer, but he's not given a lot to work with and unfortunately, he only gets the first and last fights to show off his skills, including leg-lock/hackysack kick and his triple no-shadow kick. Let's not even talk about the dubbed voice his character gets stuck with. But really, in the end, this is another movie where the material around Hwang simply fails to live up to the greatness he exudes, including the hero.

**Eagle's Claw, The (Hong Kong, 1970: William Wen)** - The story begins with Hang Ying Chieh who fights with a man on a beach. The man uses a whip and hurts him and Han Ying Chieh kills him with his eagle's claw. Then, we see Tam Yi Lee, her father and some men who are escorting a cart in which there is a coffin. They are attacked by some men who want to rob the coffin and are under the orders of an evil woman played by Mang Lee.

After escaping, they meet a young man (Paul Chang Chung) in an inn and he goes with them. Later, he disappears but helps them secretly when they are attacked once again and only the father, the daughter and the pilot of the cart are left. The father sends his daughter with another cart in a direction, while he takes another direction with

the first cart and his man. While he is attacked by Mang Lee's men, Tam Yi Lee is attacked by Mang Lee herself. Both father and daughter are hurt and Mang Lee robs Tam Yi Lee's cart, in which there's the coffin.

The father arrives and chase her, while Tam Yi Lee is cured by Chang Chung. When she discovers that the coffin is empty, Mang Lee takes Tam Yi Lee's father as hostage, while Tam Yi Lee's discovers that Chang Chung had stolen the corpse and has hidden it in the house where he cured her. Then Mang Lee and her men arrive and she fights with Chang Chung, both of them knowing the eagle's claw skill. Finally, Chang Chung succeeds in killing Mang Lee but she has badly hurt him and he finally dies. But that's a good movie, with very good fights.

**Eagle's Claw (Taiwan, 1978: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Dating back from 1977, EAGLE'S CLAW is a kung-fu potboiler with a twist starring minor martial stars Chi Kuan-chun and Don Wong. Chen Tien-chun (Chi Kwan Chun) and Li Chi (Don Wong) are the top students in an Eagle Claws martial art style school. One day an old enemy of their master, the long white-haired Chow Ma-wu (Chang Yi), comes back with his own disciples to settle some old scores. He has now become an exponent of the lethal Mantis Fist and he and the Eagle's master grievously hurt each other in the ensuing duel. Knowing he is dying and his school still endangered by Chow, the Master appoints Li Chi as his successor much to the dismay of Chen the expected heir. In fact he grows so bitterly despondent over this that he accidentally kills the ailing master in a drunken rage. Now a pariah hunted down by his own former Eagle fellow disciples, Chen is invited to join the enemy camp. Having to choose between a life on the run or becoming a complete betrayer, Chen's decision will determine the very survival of the Eagle Clan. But everything may not be actually what it seems.

While EAGLE'S CLAW uses the familiar element of the vengeance driven plot, the white haired villain and the rival animal styles, the tale is given a whole new twist by having the usually heroic Chi Kuan-chun apparently heading towards the dark side. It's a neat trick leading to quite gripping suspense, drama and plot twists that is head and shoulders above those usually found in k-f films. There is much fighting throughout the film but they usually don't last very long and end before any real excitement can be built-up. Thankfully, the last twenty minutes contains two sustained bouts, involving blade-wielding henchmen. The movie's most quirky element also develops in the last third of the film. Chi Kuan-chun's character begins to flirt with the cute female henchman, who as she keeps exchanging barbs and slaps ("you're the most cunning and odious man I ever got to know") with Chen is slowly falling for him, a very neat plot development.

Shortly after having seen EAGLE'S CLAW's English sub version, this reviewer saw a French-dub one. Besides sparing me the arduous task of having to decipher hard to read sub-titles, this version actually sports dubbing voices of astonishing warmth and eloquence. English dubbing jobs are notoriously bad and have massively contributed to k-f cinema's repute of cheesy mediocrity, while the French ones on the other hand sound very classy with voices done by seasoned actors (which may explain why the French have generally a somewhat greater respect for martial art cinema than Anglo-Saxons do). Unfortunately at least some French distributors took the sorry habit of drastically cutting their k-f exports. Not for any censorship reason (as in England) but to shorten the running time and to allow for more daily screenings, a despicable practice that is especially disheartening considering the usual great quality of the dub.

EAGLE'S CLAW was directed by Lee Tso Nam deemed by many as one of the best Taiwanese-based independent k-f directors whose HOT COOL AND VICIOUS (76), THE WOMAN AVENGER (78) and LEGS FIGHTERS (80) are also reviewed on this web site. His movies often featured an unusual take on a convention of the genre, sounder dramatic plotting as well as memorable characters. EAGLE'S CLAW is well in line with his other films and might be one of his very best works.

Both Eagle Claws and Mantis fist are actual martial art styles of northern origin. Eagle (or Ying Jiao in Chinese) is said to date back to the Yuen Dynasty (1271-1366). It is therefore a much more ancient art than the southern Shaolin derived styles usually seen in k-f movies such as Hung Gar or Wing-Chun which were primarily developed in the course of the last three centuries. A joint-hook, throw down, pressure point attacks centred brand of fighting, Eagle Claw is said to actually look like Japanese Jujitsu to some degree. Its main recognisable features are it's claw like handgrip and it's characteristic stance mimicking a bird of prey. Like Eagle, Mantis (or Tong Lun) is a pressure-point attack centred, a merciless brand of fighting. Typically the mantis stylist would grasp an opponent's arm with it's hook-like hand, throw him off-balance, leaving him open to a devastating darting attack on some of the body's most vulnerable areas, such as the throat, the temple, or the armpits. Both Eagle and Mantis are favourites among k-f movie choreographers because of their flashy, exotic moves, although whether these arts are accurately being shown in this particular film might be another matter entirely. Indeed the two EAGLE CLAWS stars are actually southern animal stylists while the main villain Chang Yi and the fight choreographer – Tommy Lee - are Peking Opera trained performers. Except for the opening credits sequence, the film does not really offer any real insight into how Eagle Claws truly works and the film contains some typical Peking Opera acrobatics as well as a couple of wire enhanced jumps, which thankfully do not really detract from the fight scenes.

EAGLE'S CLAW's lead star Chi Kuan-chun was a discovery of the great martial art filmmaker Chang Cheh who showcased him during his Taiwanese autonomous period between 1974 and 1977. Towering and stoically intense, Chi was the perfect foil for the smaller and impish Fu Sheng and they were often paired together as in SHAOLIN MARTIAL ART (74), FIVE SHAOLIN MASTERS (75) and DISCIPLES OF SHAOLIN (same). But while both Chang Cheh and Fu Sheng eventually rejoined the Shaw Brothers studio in H-K, Chen continued his career on his own. Up through the early Eighties he made another twenty movies (he made 32 in total) and but since then he appears to have transitioned to television. As a real live Hung-gar exponent, Chen is a splendid screen-fighter with great presence but rather a one-note actor. The film's villain is being played by Chang Yi who actually started out in the late sixties as a Shaw Brothers heroic lead player before switching to bad guys towards the mid-seventies. One of his henchmen appearing towards the end is a shaved Phillip Ko wielding a steal retractable spear. Another one is Leung Kar Yan who had his screen-debut with SHAOLIN MARTIAL ART, one of Chen Kwan Tai's very first movies. Ironically a couple of years later in the Sammo directed THE VICTIM (80) both Leung and Chang would work again although this time, it was Leung as the hero to Chang Yi's usual ruthless bad-guy. One of Chen and Don Wong's fellow Eagle Claw disciples is being played by Lung Fung (a.k.a. Jimmy Lee) who would become quite notorious later on in playing villains in gambling movies such as GOD OF GAMBLERS (89). EAGLE was also the film debut of cute Hwa Ling who did a handful of k-f movies in the late seventies. She's involved in some fights which she performs all by herself, but neither her role as the Eagle's master daughter or her fighting make any real great impression. The lovelorn henchwoman played by an actress named Wang Kuai-sheng on the other hand is a bit more memorable.

In the end some viewers might find EAGLE'S CLAW just too tame in terms of fighting to fully satisfy. On the other hand, in a genre where formulaic and sloppy plotting is the rule, the intriguing take offered by EAGLE'S CLAW isn't something to overlook thus making the movie into a very recommended find for those who would have something more than mere exotic fist fights on their k-f menu.

**Eagle's Killer, The (Hong Kong, 1981: William Cheung)** - Tai (John Cheung) tries to enter the local martial arts school (to further an already decent amount of skills but mostly does the dishes or flat out end up in trouble. Mostly making enemies with the stuttering son (Cheng Hong-Yip) of a wealthy man, Tai tries being the student of contract killer Lo (Hwang Jang-Lee). One of many ventures to not work out, Tai's true skill will blossom under the guidance of Chin Pai To (Fan Mei-Sheng) and then it's out to rid the world of fraudulent masters and hired killers...

We smell the influences of Snake In The Eagle's Shadow and Drunken Master early and as much as The Eagle's Killer rips off, it goes certain unexpected directions as well. However it doesn't make it more than a fast-paced annoyance with skills aplenty sporadically. In a fine opening credits demo, we see Hwang Jang-Lee crush bones literally and it's clear he will light up this movie despite himself running on repeat. The film is actually fairly sparse on martial arts and chooses to dabble in comedic scenarios requiring choreography instead. Lacking the more tuned touches needed to stand out, at least you won't see people fighting over money stuck in the mouth of a dead master or our lead being sold as a male sex slave! Originality perhaps, it barely registers and when adhering to age old structure eventually, we look at our hero Tai and feel little relation to his revenge on the world who rejected him. In fact, the cockiness doesn't play well either and as a lead, John Cheung lacks appeal. Chiang Kam co-stars while Wong Jing co-wrote the script. Director William Cheung brought us notorious snake terror in the form of Calamity Of Snakes 2 years later.

**Edge of Fury (Hong Kong, 1978: Lee Tso-Nam) – aka Blood on his Hands** - A wealthy business man is arrested and sentenced to death for drug smuggling, and it's up to his trustworthy chauffeur, Fang Pao (Bruce Li), to unravel the mystery behind his boss's downfall. Was he really smuggling drugs? Was he set up? Does his boss's sleazy girlfriend (Dana Tsen) have something to do with it? The closer Fang Pao gets to the facts, the more dangerous his life becomes.

"Edge of Fury" is a tale of gangsters, drugs, annoying little kids and money-hungry whores. Just like "Iron Dragon Strikes Back" (aka Gold Connection), "Edge of Fury" was made without "Bruce Lee" in mind, meaning Bruce Li is playing an original character, and not imitating Bruce Lee in any way, shape, or form.

I've seen the gist of every Bruce Li movie ever made. Some are great (Iron Dragon Strikes Back, Gold Connection), some are good (Bruce Lee: The Man, The Myth), some are average (The Dragon Lives), some are bad (Deadly Strike) and some are so bad, they're entertaining (Bruce Lee: A Dragon Story). "Edge of Fury" falls somewhere between good and average.

What I do like about "Edge of Fury" is the assortment of goodies it has to offer:

- *Babes*: When you're watching a Bruce Li movie and you see the name "Dana" pop in the credit sequence, you know you're in for a slutty treat. Dana slightly resembles porn starlet Nautica Thorn (fellas, don't act like you don't know who she is), only much more cuter. Dana also appeared with Bruce Li in "Image of Bruce Lee" and "Bruce Lee in New Guinea."
- As a bonus, we also get the foxy Michelle Mai Suet (aka Michelle Lai), who plays Bruce Li's girlfriend. Michelle and Dana look so much alike that I didn't realize they were two different characters until the film's third act. True story.
- *Music*: Typically, most kung fu films of the 70's recycle music from popular movies; I've heard and recognized it all: James Bond themes, Italian Westerns, disco tunes, etc; As far as I know, "Edge of Fury" has its own unique soundtrack. It's screechy, rough, and hardcore; Which is very suitable for a movie titled "Edge of Fury."
- *Annoying Little Kid*: I swear, I've seen this little turd before (he looks like the ice cream cone kid in "Way of the Dragon"). You're going to love to hate him, thanks to his retarded english dubbing. Is it me, or does he and Bruce Li like each other a little too much?
- *Yasuaki Kurata*: You've seen this Japanese cat in movies like "The Angry Guest," "Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Stars" and "Fist of Legend." In "Edge of Fury" it's him vs. Bruce Li, baby.

There's definitely enough action to go around, which was choreographed by Tommy Lee, who also has a major role as a baddie. I haven't seen enough of Tommy Lee's work (as a star or choreographer), but from what I have seen, I don't see what the big deal is. I remember having a copy of "Chinese Connection II" on VHS, and one of the selling points was "Action Choreographer Tommy Lee," yet, after viewing it, I was like "and?"

**Eight Diagram Cudgel (Hong Kong, 1987: Do Gong-Yue) – aka Eight Diagram Fighter** - This movie came out two years after Liu Chia Liang's enormously popular "Eight Diagram Pole Fighter," and unfortunately suffers by comparison. Still, "Eight Diagram Cudgel" is quite satisfying and is worth renting or even purchasing as one of the Black Belt Theatre's Double Feature DVDs (along with "Magnificent Natural Fist").

"Eight Diagram Cudgel" covers most of the same narrative and philosophical territory as "Eight Diagram Fighter," having to do with the Yiang family's betrayal by the government and the fifth son's retreat to the Shaolin temple. Like Liu Chia Liang's entrant, "Cudgel" is almost purely a drama with little or no inappropriate humor.

It's not hard to see why "Cudgel" has passed out of the public's consciousness. There are few recognizable stars, the main character lacks charisma, there are probably too few kung fu scenes by most fan's standards, and the overall quality of the kung fu doesn't compare to "Eight Diagram Pole Fighter." However, "Cudgel" has the following points in its favor:

- as a drama it is more effective than "Eight Diagram Pole Fighter," not being marred by Alexander Fu Sheng's over-the-top performance and the general incoherence of LCL's version (caused largely in part by Fu Sheng's untimely death during filming)
- the kung fu is still more than adequate. There are quite a few worthy pole fighters in this movie, and the choreography, editing and camera-work/lighting are more than competent
- while not being as over-the-top as, say, ZU or Hero, "Cudgel" does drift over into the world of "magic kung fu", and I would say effectively so. There are a few moments of balletic wire fu that really are quite sublime, and many of the other "magic kung fu" special-effects are simplistic but charming.

Kung fu fans would be well-served to check out this alternate interpretation of the Yiang family story. Overall I would rate it somewhere around 6.5 or 7 stars out of 10.

**Eight Diagram Lotus Palm (People's Republic of China, 1987: Liu Zhongming, Ma Shida) – aka A Lost Skill** - I came into this one nothing absolutely nothing about it. When I saw early on that the emphasis was going to be on the pa-kua chang (baguazhang) style, I was hoping that this would be the definitive film on the style. I was disappointed, as it turned out to be a kung fu melodrama instead.

The bulk of the story is told in flashback. The story begins when a guy witnesses his son being saved from a tiger by a mysterious man who uses a nifty palm attack. The guy tells his wife/lover/girlfriend about it, who (coincidentally) was a student of the style. The three go into the forest to look for the guy while the girl reminisces about her youth and how she and two other homeless boys were taken in by a pa-kua master who cared for them for a number of years. She fell in love with one of the boys and circumstances ended up separating them. At the end of the film, the

mysterious man turns out to be the guy she loved and she dumps the other guy (who was perfectly nice man) for her old lover.

There are only a handful of short fights in the movie. While pa-kua is used in most of the fights, it's not portrayed in an exciting way, unlike those fights involving the style that Sammo Hung, Yuen Woo-Ping, and Tsui Siu-Ming choreographed during their careers. The choreography is kind of clumsy at times. The most interesting is how the pa-kua practitioners can use their qi in much the same way as a Jedi Master can use the force (eg. pushing people back, throttling people from a distance, etc.). However, those scenes really conflict with the otherwise modern and realistic setting of the film.

**Eight Diagram Pole Fighter (Hong Kong, 1984: Lau Kar-Leung) - aka Invincible Pole Fighter** - I turned the television off and sat in quiet admiration, realizing that I had just watched the greatest kungfu film I'd ever seen. Liu Chia-liang's bleak, violent masterpiece left a burn mark on my brain and remains, ten years after I first saw it, my favorite kungfu film of all time. It's uncharacteristically savage and brutal. Liu was known for making films tempered with wisdom and pacifism -- he directed more than a few kungfu films in which no one even dies, something very rare for the genre.

The number one source for the anger fuelling the film was the untimely death of the Shaw Studio's brightest star, Alexander Fu Sheng. Barely into his 20s, Fu Sheng had become the James Dean of the Hong Kong action scene, known for his love of fast cars, high rolling, and romancing women, one of whom was a budding pop star who grew up in Canada named Sally Yeh. Fu Sheng often played a hot-head with a heart of gold, and he carried that role beyond the screen.

There was no doubt that under the wing of phenomenal director Liu Chia-liang, Fu Sheng's star was back on the rise after a devastating accident left him with two broken legs. He stood to be as popular as Jackie Chan, who had really hit the big time in the 1980s and achieved a level of success hitherto unobtained by Shaw Brothers stars, most of whom had disappeared, defected to other studios, or were working with Liu. Alexander fu Sheng was, in many ways, the studio's best hope to prosper in the changing times.

It all came crashing to a halt, however, when Alexander's penchant for fast driving finally caught up with him. He died in a car wreck -- living like James Dean, dying like James Dean. His passing, which occurred during the filming of *Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*, cast a dark shadow over the studio, which was dying a slow death of its own as Raymond Chow's Golden Harvest studio became the reigning king of Hong Kong cinema. With Alexander's death, the Shaw Brothers Studio watched any hope it had to compete with the new school disappear.

Fu Sheng was well-liked, and his death put everyone in a bad mood. It is this mood that colors the landscape of the film, which is relentless and oppressive. It opens on a battlefield, where the noble Yang family is ambushed and slaughtered. Before the credits are over, nearly everyone is slain. Only two Yang brothers survive -- Liu Chia-hui and Alexander Fu Sheng. Fu Sheng has gone insane after witnessing the murder of his brothers and father. Chia-hui is on the run.

Alexander returns home to his mother and sisters to deliver the bad news. Meanwhile, Liu Chia-hui seeks refuge at a Buddhist temple. He, too, is quite mad, driven by an uncontrollable rage and bloodlust. His demeanor doesn't exactly mesh well with the pacifist nature of the monks, but they take pity on him and humor his desire to become a monk.

The abbot of the temple visits the family to let them know their son is still alive, and his sister, played by the always wonderful Hui Ying-hung, sets out to bring him home. At the temple, Chia-hui practices pole fighting with a ferocity that upsets the monks, who explain to him that they learn to fight only to defend themselves from marauding wolves. Even then, they find only to defang the wolves, not kill them.

Of course, a toothless wolf would die a far more agonizing, drawn out death than one simply killed outright, but the movie doesn't bother with that.

When the men who ambushed the Yang family gang up and capture the valiant Hui Ying-hung, Liu Chia-hui leaves the temple to rescue her. The ensuing battle amid a pyramid of coffins is astounding. It has some wire work, but it's used fairly subtly and not to achieve superhuman feats. The kungfu is fast and brutal, and just as the two Yangs

seem beaten, Chia-hui's brothers from the temple show up to "defang the wolves." What follows is a chilling sequence in which the monks rip out whole sets of villain teeth.

The entire film runs at near breakneck speed, with the anger building and building until the stunning and cathartic finale. In the end, Liu Chia-hui is left wandering between two worlds, too violent to be a monk, yet too alienated to return to the troubled world. It's very much like the situation facing the studio and its stars. An uncertain future, unable to exist via the old ways, unable to fully grasp the new ways.

It's an explosion of emotion -- anger, frustration, madness, disappointment, confusion, and maybe a little hope. The humor Liu Chia-liang so often used is non-existent. The compassion is lost in the madness of the situation as the characters are swept up in the uncontrollable firestorm of rage. It is bleak, depressing, and ultimately open-ended. Liu Chia-hui's only revelation is that he is a beast unfit for life as a man or monk.

It's also one of the most effective, moving, and exciting kungfu films ever made. Everyone was on top of their game for this one, putting an extra effort into it to ensure that Alexander Fu Sheng's final film would be memorable. Indeed it is, even though his role in it is minimal because of his death. Eight diagram Pole Fighter is effective in every way -- as a parable about the fragile state of man, about the fragile state of the studio that produced it. Films would come and go, the Shaw Brothers studio would fade, but Eight Diagram Pole Fighter remains at the very top of my list.

**Eight Dragon Swords, The (Taiwan, 1971: Chin Sheng-En)** - Connected to Shaw Brothers at some point (distributor?), regardless this is one of those early Taiwanese swordplay movies that along with King Hu showed some flair working the genre. Most didn't at this time and often efforts came off as being action-cinema in their infant stages. However Kong Ban's Hua Li Qun (also known in the martial world as The Eight Dragon Swords) trying to good in the world by taking on a rapist and a gambler as assistants only to be betrayed because they are eyeing the grand piece of the martial world (The Fire Dragon Magic Ball) is fairly involving stuff because director Chin Sheng-En (Iron Ox, The Tiger's Killer) is interested in this vision. Nothing stands out visually as this is more low-budget and restricted in terms of costumes and design. But armed with a team of choreographers knowing limitations but pushing hard for creativity anyway, there's quite intense and admirably complex, grounded choreography here. The design of the weapons usually containing blades or even flammable material to shoot at your opponent are very cool and the depiction in general of all techniques on display comes through (the 3 on 1 fight finale and wire assisted feats that sees the stuntmen HIGH up in the air, quite visible due to some glorious wide shots, ranks as highlights). Because there's care style here, even, for the genre and a coherent plot, The Eight Dragon Swords is a creative little gem when all is said and done. Also with Chen Hung-Lieh.

**Eight Escorts (Taiwan, 1980: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - THE EIGHT ESCORTS (1979, aka 8 PEERLESS TREASURES) offers a rather convoluted kung fu tale involving a case of precious jewels being transported by hired escorts and sought after by assorted thieves including a murderous "mystery bandit" lurking behind the scenes. It all benefits from a strong cast, frequent fight scenes and an engaging if sometimes confusing storyline. The negatives are a low budget, colorless direction, sloppy cinematography and some awkward edits.

Hsu Feng (TOUCH OF ZEN, THE VALIANT ONES) stars as Miss Wu, who takes over for her murdered brother, who was killed on an escort job, and is hired by a wealthy client to take a case of jade jewels and figurines to his new daughter-in-law. Hsu gets help, sometimes unexpected, from a group of intriguing characters all while coming under surprise attacks from at least four others seeking the jewels. As it turns out, several of the characters are not quite what they seem. The identity of the "mystery bandit" comes as quite a surprise.

The cast boasts a number of familiar, well-liked performers. Wang Chung (THE DELINQUENT, SHAOLIN TEMPLE) plays Hsu's loyal, mute partner. Ling Yun (DEATH DUEL, CLAN OF AMAZONS) plays a knife-thrower who helps out at crucial moments but is suspected of a hidden motive. Danny Lee (THE KILLER, CITY ON FIRE, INFRAMAN) plays a Sworn Brother of the murdered escort who offers to help Miss Wu. Kung fu diva Lily Li (EXECUTIONERS FROM SHAOLIN, DAGGERS 8, SLICE OF DEATH), looking quite beautiful and fashionably dressed and coiffed, plays a saucy would-be thief who fights each of the other major cast members at least once in the course of the action.

Tan Tao Liang, of high-kicking fame (FLASH LEGS, LEG FIGHTERS, CHALLENGE OF DEATH), plays a mysterious character who gets beaten up by bullies in his first major scene but later reveals it was all an act and delivers some of the film's best fight scenes. Wang Ching, a regular kung fu villain, plays a would-be thief and Mau Ging Shun plays



Poison Blade, another would-be thief. Wu Ma (CHINESE GHOST STORY) plays an inn proprietor (with cheeks dabbed in rouge!) who teaches kung fu to four acrobatic boys who serve as his staff at the inn. Wu and the boys lend some welcome humor to the film and it's too bad more use wasn't made of them. One other major kung fu actor makes a surprise appearance late in the game.

The fights are all adequately choreographed (by Chan Muk-Chuen) and come at a steady pace. Most are staged outdoors on location in Taiwan but shot in uncertain light. None of this is helped by the full-frame DVD version commercially available in the U.S., which cuts off action on the sides of the frame. Director Pao Hsueh Li and co-scripter Ni Kuang were both better known for their considerable bodies of work at Shaw Bros. earlier in the 1970s. All the cast have been in much better films, but it's a rare treat to see such a large and skilled group come together in such a low-budget production.

**8 Masters, The (Taiwan, 1977: Joseph Kuo)** - 'The 8 Masters' opens in classic style with a kung fu duel, the final throws of which are played out in a silhouette against the dawn sky. The story then moves on with an often used plot device where a child escapes to Shaolin Temple, following the death of his family, and grows up to become Carter Wong.

After years of martial arts training the boy is finally ready to leave Shaolin but must first undergo the famous trials to prove that he is sufficiently skilled to be allowed out into the outside world. This portrayal of the tests of Shaolin is probably one of the best realised efforts I've seen and this section of the film is particularly impressive. Carter not only has to make his way past numerous traps but also has to fight the 18 Bronzemen in a series of exciting bouts. One in particular sees a complicated staff fight set on a structure in the shape of a swastika surrounded by spikes.

Although he tries to live a peaceful life on the outside of Shaolin, Chu (Carter Wong) finds himself hounded by the same 8 Martial arts masters who killed his father and is forced into a series of duels.

The fight scenes see solid shapes from Carter Wong and while there is little to no legwork the hand to hand choreography is excellently handled. The camerawork seems to be made up of a mix of handheld camera shots, getting right into the action, and wide angle shots. While featuring very grounded fighting there is a smattering of acrobatics (with doubles for Carter Wong obviously), to mix things up a bit.

The film isn't sparse on action for the first hour but in the last thirty minutes the film goes into overdrive as Carter faces each of the 8 masters in succession; its practically non-stop fighting. Despite getting a bit surreal at the end with hopping vampires and fast editing this is still great entertainment.

**8 Strikes of the Wildcat (Hong Kong, 1976: Lin Yi-Hsui)** - A very generic storyline with the heroine seeking revenge against the gang who murdered her father but first finding an old kung fu master to teach her an almost forgotten kung fu style. I love these films though that feature ridiculously made up styles and here we get two; the wild cat style is used as a counter measure against the gang's 'three rats' style. The moves are totally unbelievable (and some almost laughable) but great fun. Chi Dan Dan is a wonderfully gifted leading lady who has plenty of agility to handle the complex moves required in the fight scenes. The training scenes are also impressive with original props that make you wonder how anyone is supposed to exercise without doing themselves an injury.

**18 Bronze Girls Of Shaolin (Taiwan, 1978: Chow Toi-Sang)** - The concept of bronzemen are cool as seen in Joseph Kuo's The 18 Bronzemen so when it was the ladies' turn, the concept remains cool but only when allowed on screen... which isn't often. No, the rest of this confusing, unfunny time is occupied by confusing and unfunny characters. All battling (within uninspired choreography) against someone... for something and if I sound confused, even the characters admit that they are. Possibly all a parody of the martial arts fantasy genre it belongs too, it's still an unfunny attempt. Energy is a bit better towards the end, with a room of traps sequence amping the fun because just like the bronzegirls, traps are fun. Parody the actual fun next time, please. Yueh Hua appears in an end twist cameo.

**18 Bronzemen (Hong Kong, 1976: Joseph Kuo)** - Joseph Kuo had been reasonably successful making Taiwanese swordplay movies in the early seventies but it was this classic that really brought him to the attention of genre fans

worldwide. With a decent sized budget (for a Taiwanese martial arts flick) and a strong cast, '18 Bronzemen' is one of those ground breaking movies that not only spawned a sequel but also influenced film makers for years after.

The plot is a pretty basic revenge story but that isn't really much of a concern as there is enough going on to keep the viewer interested. The focus here is really on the fighting, of which there is plenty.

A young boy, who's parents have apparently died in unfortunate circumstances (a flood), is left in the care of Shaolin temple. The real story is that the boy is the son of a Ming general who has been killed by the invading Manchus. The film then moves on eighteen years and the young boy, Shao Lung, has grown up (and is played by Tien Peng). Deciding that he must avenge his father's death Shao Lung asks permission to leave the temple but before he is allowed to go he must prove himself worthy by passing the test of the 18 Bronzemen. He is joined by fellow class mate Wan Tai Chun (Carter Wong) and the two enter the chambers of the 18 Bronzemen. In each chamber they are faced by a different challenge which includes bronze painted men wielding staffs and swords or who are completely dressed in iron armour.

The training and tests take up the major part of the film and certainly seems to be where most of the budget went as it shot entirely within effective studio sets. The fighting is brilliantly choreographed and both Carter Wong and Tien Peng put in excellent performances. Tien Peng's staff fight against three bronze men is a standout moment as is Carter Wong's stunning battle against 3 bronze swordsmen. This just goes to show how skilled a fight choreographer Chan Siu Pang was even in earlier works such as this.

Eventually the two pass the tests and win their freedom. In the outside world they meet Polly Shang Kwan who's past is linked to Shao Lung's. After a couple of attempts on Shao Lung's life (his enemies obviously anticipating an act of revenge) the three go on the offensive against the Manchu general that killed Shao Lung's father.

This end sequence really struggles to match the intensity of the battles seen earlier in the film but is still worthwhile. I've not seen many of Polly Shang Kwan's films but her performance in this does make me eager to see more. Apparently a black belt in Judo, Karate and Taekwondo, Polly certainly comes across well in her screen fights in this film.

The final fight scene did confuse me a little as there seemed to be a massive continuity error. One minute they're fighting in street set, in the very next shot they're somewhere in the countryside. That's my only very slight niggle in this otherwise excellent film. The final showdown is an intricate three on one battle that in any other movie would have been outstanding, here it is dwarfed by the 18 Bronzemen sequences.

An unmissable film and a genre classic that should be in every kung fu film fan's collection.

**18 Fatal Strikes (Hong Kong, 1978: Yang Ching-chen)** - What can I say ? This movie is (IMO) very similar to *Phantom Kung Fu*: similar context (rebels and oppressors), weird techniques with whacky side-effects (Chang Yi's hands smoke whenever he uses his palm of death in *Phantom Kung Fu*, here the villain - not sure what the name of the actor is, but he looks quite badass - has whacky sound effects and high-pitched screams coming up) and trouble finding a tone (this film goes from guys bickering and sounding like a Monty Python skit to a girl being raped and murdered to people crying and going mad with vengeance...).

That said, it's not a bad film. The fights are entertaining (thanks to the villain's sound effects and to decent choreography - the scene with weapons is a nice touch as well), the main characters are likeable (their bickering is more enjoyable than annoying and they provide some good comedy in the first half) but the monk could have been more developed and the bad guys aren't that memorable (except for the main villain's sound effects).

Overall, I guess it's safe to say this film's on par with the rest of this set - I mentioned *Phantom Kung Fu*, but there are also similarities with *Tai Chi Shadow Boxing* (found out while re-reading my review of this one, as it seems like I had next to completely forgotten about it - but the master and his two students, the comedy/bickering, the under-developed villains... Pretty close).

**Eighteen Jade Arhats, The (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung Yan-Git) - aka 18 Jade Pearls; Jade Killer; Eighteen Claws of Shaolin; Jaws of the Black Dragon** - Good to see Cheung Chieh Min is the Wood Decorator for this film. Back when he wasn't doing the wood decorating, the wood just didn't look quite right...

The movie starts off with these people fighting this cool weird metal spider practice dummy lookin' thing, which is actually pretty meaningless until the last 5 minutes of the movie. But it does look pretty cool, and they probably put a lot of time into building it, so I can see why they'd put it in the beginning credits too.

This strange swordsman (Ku Yin Pong) comes in and kicks about 30 peoples asses in about 24 hours. He off's this one guy with the "Low Hand Palm." Now at least I think they say the "Low Hand Palm." Though it could be the "Lo Han Palm" or something like that. Anyway, it's pretty much the iron finger but your whole hand. It kicks your ass.

The guys brother thinks it's this old dude Wong Chong Wei (who knows this "Low Hand Palm" technique) and goes to kick his ass. But his kung-fu is shitty and Wong Chong Wei kicks his ass in about 15 seconds then drops a bed of spikes on his ass.

So Wong Chong Wei is pissed that someone else knows his technique so he vows to kill the guy who knows it.

In the meantime, Ku Yin Pong kicks the asses of about 40 more lackeys.

Also, the clan of the guy who got killed by Ku Yin Pong is hiring any killers they can find to kill Ku Yin Pong. It took me a while to figure out who the hell they were. So this guy Chin (Think Curly from the 3 Stooges in the body of a 65-year-old man) shows up to give it a go. He gets wasted of course but is pretty funny. So Sa Wu Chi gives it a go... But he gets his ass kicked by this girl in the beginning of the movie, who can kick just about anybody's ass. So they want her to go kill him but she won't do so she recommends this other sculptor dude...

Ahhh screw the plot. It's way too complicated to spell out here. In short, everybody is really after the Jade Arhats. But are they? You get the drift.. There's a whole lot of ass kickin in the movie. Unfortunately a lot of the ass kicking is kind of "implied" and they tried to use a lot of weapons and a little blood to take the place of quality acrobatics. But it didn't quite succeed. To the movie's credit though, the end scene is pretty damn good and the plot is pretty engaging.

**18 Swirling Riders (Taiwan, 1977: Lin Fu-Ti) – aka 18 Shaolin Riders; 18 Riders for Justice** - Weak movie from director Lin Fu-Ti (*Master and the Kid*) starring Don Wong and Chen Sing. The plot seemed interesting but quickly became convoluted and hard to follow. The action was sparse for the first hour, and when there was some, it was weak and so dark you couldn't tell what was going on. The last half an hour had more and better action, but by that time any investment you ha on the story or characters is mostly lost. *Master and the Kid* is a much better movie.(and it isn't "great" either, but very good).

**Emperor and his Brother, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Chor Yuan)-** With possibly the most confusing beginning to any kung fu movie I've ever seen, 'The Emperor and his Brother' feels like a sequel as it rushes through a series of fast cut sequences that set the backdrop to another typically involved Chor Yuan offering. The basics of the story are that the Qing emperor (Jason Pai Piao) was swapped at birth with the then emperor's daughter and is actually a Han by birth. When Han supporters take the, in retrospect, risky decision to inform the emperor of his true ancestry, in the hope of expediting an end to Manchu rule, the news isn't exactly well received and their deaths are ordered to prevent the word from spreading.

Its at this point that the main story begins and the film does become much easier to follow as the two Han messengers take refuge at a safehouse, owned by Han sympathiser Guk Fung. Unfortunately Manchu troops search the house and discover the two rebels. While one of them manages to escape, the other is captured. After a failed rescue attempt the Han rebels, led by Ti Lung, take advantage of an opportunity to kidnap the emperor in the hope of trading for their lost comrade. It's while the emperor is in his care that Ti Lung reveals that he is actually the emperor's brother. When the exchange is arranged it sets the scene for a blistering showdown between the rebels and the emperor's best fighters.

While the film features regular action throughout, balancing just right with the intricate plot, the best is saved for last with the prisoner exchange turning into an awesome series of kung fu challenges, each more intense than the last. The standard of choreography is very high and varied, with swordplay dominating the first hour or so but giving way to more complicated hand to hand sequences in the final reel. There is some use of gimmickry with Ti Lung using a special 'peacock fist' technique which allows him to confuse his enemies by being in two places at once. The special effects are rather basic but quite effective and these sequences work well.

This is probably one of the most elaborate Shaw Brother films I've watched with stunningly ornate sets and, of course, that excellent costume design setting the screen ablaze with vibrant colour. Altogether this is another class Shaw's production.

**Enchantress, The (Hong Kong, 1983: Chor Yuen)** - A vengeful spirit seeks to slay all in the "martial world" because of an age old grudge, possessing and using powers of illusion and deception to have her way. Some members of the "martial world" must band together with the aid of a some monks and priests to stop her! That is a VERY brief plot summary, Chor Yuen actually does a good job slowly revealing more about the characters and story. It is not your typical perplexing Chor Yuen flick, the story is pretty straight forward but still decent. The film mixes wuxia, comedy, and horror fairly effectively in my opinion. I wouldn't call it a comedy at all, but there are a couple humorous characters that help lighten the mood, named those of Lo Lieh and Yim Chau-Wah. Most of the comedy is subtle, and it works because of it. The cast was very strong, although the lead stars were lackluster in Max Mok (his first film), and Yung Jing-Jing. Thankfully, Ngai Chau-Wah is great as the bat shit crazy vengeful spirit, and the supporting players were made up of Shaw veterans in the likes of Lo Lieh, Lau Wing, and Yueh Hua. Norman Chu has a really cool cameo as a character who shares the namesake of his character from The Bastard Swordsman, "Yun Feiyang".

I read a bit about this film before watching. One of the largest criticisms I saw was overuse of effects, and very little grounded fighting. While many effects are used, they are actually pretty well done outside of your typical corny "beam" attacks. Objects floating, characters teleporting or disappearing, things of that nature were well done in my opinion. As far as the fighting goes, there was actually plenty of grounded swordplay and a little hand to hand as well. It was generally well done, if nothing too complex or inspired. Still plenty of nice swordplay framed from a distance with fairly long takes, just what we expect from Chor Yuen! I found it odd this movie seems to be criticized for this, when "The Sentimental Swordsman" features nearly no real swordplay, but that doesn't get mentioned... Oh well!

Its very atmospheric film with some really beautiful dark sets, I am pretty sure it was shot completely indoors, reminded me a bit of "The Jade Tiger" in this way. Also aiding in the atmosphere was the use of what had to be every fog machine Shaw Bros. owned at the time.. I mean its crazy, there is literally fog in every scene just about! There was good eerie music throughout adding to the feel of the film, although at times it was offset by some pretty whacky sound effects.. But what the hell, they were funny!

It isn't one of my favorite movies helmed by Chor Yuen, but I thought it was very entertaining and I enjoyed it. It is one of those films that just seemed to fly by because it was "fun". The mystery in the story is pretty much laid out by half an hour in, but the plot moves fast with plenty of fx and swordplay after that to keep us entertained. I find it hard to say anything was stellar about it, but I can say I had a blast watching it. Its biggest strength is probably the characters, and effective mixing of elements from different genres. The weak leads hurt it a bit, but luckily this is really more of an "ensemble" cast movie with everyone sharing screen time.

**Encounter of the Spooky Kind (Hong Kong, 1980: Sammo Hung)** - Sammo Hung directed and starred in this ground-breaking film that was one of the first to effectively combine both kung fu and the supernatural. Though made nearly 20-years ago in 1980, the film still feels very fresh and holds up as a very entertaining bit of fun. This film along with others from some of the New Wave directors – Tsui Hark, Ann Hui etc. – sent HK cinema off in new and exciting directions during the 1980's.

This is also one of the first films to use one of my favorite staples of the HK supernatural films – the hopping vampire. In most of the films that I have seen them in I can't honestly say they are particularly frightening – having to hop makes getting away from them seem much too easy – but they are a wonderful cinematic device. Chinese hopping vampires are not vampires in the same way as Dracula – as they are actually reanimated corpses – zombies really - who often get quite hungry for human flesh. Their feet being tied together causes the hopping motion.

Sammo – named Courageous Cheung in the film – lives in a small town at some point long in the past and he soon has his simple life turned upside down by a number of encounters with the supernatural. His friends bet him that he doesn't have the courage to peel an apple at midnight in front of a mirror. If the skin gets broken they tell Sammo – he will have many problems – but if he can peel it without breaking the skin he will get a free lunch. Well, Sammo is not one to pass up a free meal! His friends play some practical jokes on him to try and scare him, but a real ghost shows up and snatches his friend through the mirror. Strangely enough, this incident is forgotten the next day and this thread of the film is never taken up again. Must have been a common occurrence in those days!

The main story revolves around Sammo and his unfaithful wife. She is carrying on an affair with Sammo's boss – Master Tam - while Sammo is happily taking his afternoon break eating tofu. One day though Sammo almost catches them in the act and Master Tam decides that Sammo must be taken care of. To do this he hires a Taoist priest (Chan Lung) - to use Black Magic to kill Sammo. Fortunately his ethical younger brother (Chung Fat) who is also a Taoist priest learns of the scheme and lends his services to Sammo.

Sammo somehow gets himself involved in another bet – with Wu Ma who is in cahoots with the bad guys – and he has to spend two nights locked in a temple with a hopping vampire. The scenes of Sammo trying to first hide – on the beams above, under the coffin and finally in the coffin - and then fight the vampire are great. When this doesn't work, Master Tam frames Sammo for his wife's murder and policeman Lam Ching-ying is soon pursuing Sammo across the countryside. In the final encounter Sammo takes on the spirit of the Monkey King to fight the evil doers.

The film is very well paced – never flags – and has some excellent action scenes and some comedic moments as well. One of the best scenes epitomizes this combination. Sammo is having lunch at an inn while on the run from Lam Ching-ying when a spell is put on his left arm and he loses control of it and it starts attacking everyone. This brings him to the attention of Lam and his troops and in a wonderfully choreographed piece they attack Sammo. After Sammo beautifully defends himself – he takes on a self-satisfied smile – and sits on a bench – only to have it break under his weight and he is sent sprawling to the floor.

**End of the Wicked Tigers (Hong Kong, 1973: Law Kei)** - END OF THE WICKED TIGERS is an average kung fu film with an adequate story and several good fights, but lacks any strong characters of note and is not terribly well edited. The simple storyline lends itself well to the usual array of kung fu battles between an oppressive gang and the two heroes who stand up to it. In a remote town in turn-of-the-early 20th century China, a new police captain, Ling (Lee Ka Ting), and his men confront a town boss, Chang (Han Ying Chieh), whose son (Wilson Tong) and henchmen have had the run of the town to themselves for years. Tong and his buddies, who include Sammo Hung, are seen brutally beating and killing, in two separate incidents, unarmed innocent men who don't have a chance against them. Only one townsman, Ma San (Charles Heung), is willing to stand up against the Changs, but any action he takes against them puts his brother (Eddy Ko), who works for Chang, in danger. Ma San is soon framed by the Changs in the poison deaths of three children and he has no choice but to take the law into his own hands. Eventually, Ma San and Ling take on the Chang gang in a pitched final battle.

There is one thoroughly gratuitous sex scene, involving ample nudity, that's the most explicit such scene I've ever seen in a kung fu film. It involves two minor characters, the gang member who did the actual poisoning and a prostitute at the local brothel, and seems to have been added to pad out the running time of the film (already a short 83 minutes).

What the film really needed were the missing sections of the final battle. As Ma San and Captain Ling are fighting Chang and Tong, Sammo Hung and the other henchmen are beating hell out of the other policemen. That's the last we see of Sammo and company. So the final action is never satisfactorily concluded.

The two leads, Charles Heung and Lee Ka Ting, are competent, although they're not the most familiar of kung fu performers. (Heung may be known to Hong Kong film fans largely for his portrayal of "God of Guns" in the GOD OF GAMBLERS films). But they do face three formidable villains in Han Ying Chieh, Wilson Tong and Sammo Hung. (Han and Hung both worked on the fight choreography.) The photography is nearly all on outdoors Taiwan locations and is generally pretty crisp. The fights are largely well staged, except when they're completely forgotten about, as in the case of Sammo and co. at the end.

**Enter the Dragon (USA, 1973: Robert Clouse)** - And we're not just talking about the movie here. My copy is the 25th Anniversary Special Edition; before the movie, we've got the behind-the-scenes documentary made during

filming; the original theatrical trailer; a documentary called Bruce Lee: In His Own Words containing bits of TV and radio appearances and other films; and a statement from his widow, Linda Lee Caldwell, affirming that this is the final version that Bruce saw and approved (in the scant months between his death and the movie's release, the suits decided to cut about three minutes of footage). All these extras may be the norm for you DVD people, but for a little old VHS boy like myself, it was quite an unusual warm-up act.

So it's only after something like forty-five minutes of warm-up that I actually got to the movie.

And how is it?

Well, it's, you know, pretty good. I guess.

Now, before the hate mail starts weighing down my in-box, let me elaborate. Bruce Lee is great. He's breathtaking. He looks very much like the most dangerous man ever to live. And I understand how influential a big-budget Hollywood kung-fu movie was; it was practically genre-creating, at least from a marketing standpoint. But the mark of a true classic is not only that it creates a genre, but that it becomes the standard in that genre, against which all new films are compared and found wanting. (Think of *Night of the Living Dead*, or *Halloween* -- movies which widened, re-energized, or otherwise put a genre on the map, and have yet to be exceeded by their offspring.) But *Enter the Dragon*, as a movie -- you know, as a story told in film -- has some seriously laughable flaws. If not for the presence of Bruce Lee, there's no way this would have become a classic; it was a star vehicle, not a star-maker.

We open at the Shaolin temple (or, at least, at a Shaolin temple -- I'm not quite sure how the whole franchise works) Bruce Lee is giving a demonstration to the assembled monks, fighting another, rather flabby martial artist, made even flabbier by Lee's incredible physical condition; I mean, with his street clothes on, he just looks like a slight man with a big head, but shirtless his muscles are so defined he looks like he's got no skin. (The flabby martial artist, by the way, is none other than Sammo Hung, who later made the wise career decision to leave his shirt on.)

So, a few whipcrack punches and backflips later, the Master Teacher draws Lee aside. (By the way, he's only directly addressed once, as "Mr. Lee" -- I think we can safely assume that Bruce is playing himself.) What follows is three minutes of fortune-cookie wisdom, and the slight matchcut at the beginning of the sequence clued me in that this is at least part of the footage cut before release. I really can't blame the producers; we're introduced to "Zen and the Art of Kicking Ass" here, as the Teacher says such things as "I see your talents have gone beyond the mere physical level," and Lee makes such announcements as "The word 'I' does not exist." This whole scene suffers from the "Bite the Wax Tadpole" syndrome -- the fact that some things, especially, ineffable spiritual expressions, just don't translate well. (Imagine if someone in a movie said, "God is love," and all the other characters nodded and considered it carefully.)

On a more concrete level, the Teacher informs Lee about a traitor to the code of the Shaolin, a rebel named Han. Lee has already received an invitation to Han's martial arts tournament; the Teacher asks him to attend to restore the Shaolin's lost honor. (Let's keep a running tally here of motives for Lee to attend the tournament: #1, he's been invited. #2, to restore the Shaolin's honor.)

Lee then meets with a Mr. Braithwaite, a Brit in the government. (Gosh, it already seems so long ago that Hong Kong was run by a bunch of Limeys.) But in the middle of their conversation, Lee takes a break to give a mini-lesson to a young student. It's "Bite the Wax Tadpole" time again, as intones such gems such as the need to have "emotional content" in martial arts, and "It's like a finger, pointing the way to the moon." The fact that Lee sounds like Elmer Fudd every time he opens his mouth doesn't help things.

It's finally time for the opening credits, under the the violin/wakka-wakka guitar theme music. We see the colorful city of Hong Kong, in which Williams (Jim Kelly and his 'Fro of Power) and Roper (John Saxon) arrive and wander around, looking like the lost Americans they are.

In a private office, Braithwaite fills Lee in with more information on Han. Pertinent facts: He owns a private island with a martial arts training school; he's suspected of slavery and drug-related offenses; he had a bad experience with a gun once, so he doesn't allow them on his island; he runs this tournament every three years; and he has a henchman named O'Hara, with an ugly scar down his face; there's a female operative, Mei Ling, already on the island. Braithwaite and the Brits know that Han's a bad bad man, but they have no proof, so they want Lee to act as their agent while at the tournament. (#3, to gather law enforcement information.)

Now, this next sequence must have seemed good on paper, but it becomes a mess on screen. We see Lee being paddled across the bay in a small boat. The screen dissolves into a flashback, in which Lee is told by an Old Man (hey, that's what he calls him, and that's what he's listed as in the credits) how his sister Su Lin died -- and then we drop into another flashback! The Old Man and Su Lin were in the city three years ago when O'Hara and a bunch of Hans' toughs came into town, and apparently they took a shine to Su Lin. While the Old Man holds them off (and

gives O'Hara his scar), Su Lin runs, only to be pursued by about two dozen men through the narrow streets of old Hong Kong. After dishing out kicks and dope-slaps a-plenty, she finds herself cornered, and commits suicide with a big piece of glass rather than submit to O'Hara's "attentions." (Do you see anything wrong with this flashback? That's right -- the Old Man, who's telling the story, wasn't around for most of the action!)

So then we fade back out of that flashback as the Old Man finishes the story and instructs Lee to pay his respects to his mother and sister in Hong Kong. Cut then to Lee at the cemetery, apologizing to his mother that he's about to go against everything she believed in. Huh? Isn't he defending the honor of the temple, at his Teacher's request?

And finally we fade back to Lee's boat as it takes him to a larger boat. Multiple flashbacks within a flashback -- never a good idea. And we just found out #4. (Gee, do you think he's motivated yet?)

Next, we see Roper (remember, that's John Saxon's character) also being paddled. Into the flashback: While playing golf, Roper is confronted by two loan sharks because he owes \$175,000. He knocks them over (proving to all viewers that, though he may be a good fighter, there's no way in hell he should be in this tournament), gives his secretary the last \$63.43 in his bank account, and confirms his tickets to Hong Kong. (I can only surmise that there's a pot to be won in the tournament, though no one ever mentions it). And then out of the flashback.

And finally -- Williams (Jim Kelly) paddles out, accompanied by his 'Fro of Power. Oddly enough, he gets all the waves and giggles from the little kids living on houseboats. Flashback: He picks up his suitcase at an all-black dojo on his way to Hong Kong. While walking down the street at night, he is harassed for no apparent reason by two white cops who each make a point of calling him "jig." He knocks them both out and steals their police car. (Do you mean he drove that to the airport? Hey, I know security didn't used to be as tight, but do you think a soul brother could really drive in and part a squad car at LAX without raising some eyebrows?)

End of all flashbacks, thank all that's holy. Williams arrives at the larger boat and is greeted heartily by Roper, who knew him in 'Nam. Also on the boat is Parsons, a mean-for-the-sake-of-being-mean Australian that they both know.

Later in the voyage, Parson wanders around tripping crewmembers and generally being an ass. (Great, just what we need -- a schoolground bully with a black belt.) Lee, with almost Spock-like calm, tricks him into getting into a little lifeboat (ostensibly to go fight on the beach of an island) and then strings the lifeboat behind the main boat. He calls it "the style of fighting without fighting." Umm, Bruce, I'm sure your Shaolin masters would approve, but it's been almost half an hour now, and all we've seen from you is the little demonstration before the opening credits. Break a sweat, man!

Their boat arrives at Han's island, where they're greeted by Han's strawberry blonde secretary Tania, and Bolo, a massive Asian. This is Yang Sze, known in recent years as Bolo Yeung, and he is by far the most muscle-bound Asian I've ever seen. (He was recently featured in TC 2000 (1993), and if anything he's only put on the muscle.)

They are ushered into the castle-like complex, past courtyard-upon-courtyard of gi-dressed trainees, and into a banquet where Sumo wrestlers put on an exhibition, acrobats do handstands, and young Asian girls entertain the fighters. Everything falls silent when Han enters (the Sumo wrestlers even freeze in mid-bout). Han is a diminutive man with an evil leer, and Keye Luke's voice. he welcomes them, and then has a little exhibition of his own: the coterie of girls following him demonstrate their ability to skewer thrown apples with darts. (Always a good party gag.) Lee recognizes one of them as Mei Ling, the government agent.

That night, Tania leads a little parade of girls from room to room, offering them to contestants. Williams chooses four and apologizes to the rest of them; he's a little tired today. (Only in the seventies could you get away with such blatant references to the mystique of African-American prowess -- for a different take on the same mystique, see the Bad Movie Report review of Soul Vengeance.) Lee chooses Mei Ling (how convenient). Roper, charmer that he is, chooses Tania herself, who accepts the invitation.

Lee discusses the situation with Mei Ling. She's never seen outside the castle itself, but she knows that "people disappear." (Great -- good to have an agent planted for several months and have absolutely no useful information.)

So. Morning. The tournament begins, and we finally get some real fighting. Williams easily wipes the floor with Parson, while Roper makes some bets on the side. Then Roper takes on a shaggy-haired Asian, performing poorly until Williams gives him the signal that the betting has gotten high enough; then he finishes him off.

Night. Roper's getting cosy with Tania again. Lee, meanwhile, dresses in black and leaves the castle to explore. He evades and knocks out various guards, then discovers a hatch leading to the underground complex. But his rope is discovered, and he has to vamoose. Significantly, Williams is also outside (against the rules), getting some fresh air after his, um, display of prowess.

The next morning, in front of the contestants and his trainees, Han castigates the beaten guards from the night before for letting the intruder get by them. In punishment, they each have to face Bolo, who easily and gleefully kills them all.

The first bout of the day is Lee vs. O'Hara. It's a perfect bout for Lee, as O'Hara never lays a finger on him; Lee keeps getting rabbit punches in under his guard, then knocks him about soundly. When the officially defeated O'Hara grabs two broken bottles and comes back into the ring, Lee knocks him down and jumps on his neck. Snap. Han, oddly enough, is not upset with Lee; he's more nonplussed by O'Hara's treachery.

After the bout, Han calls Williams into his office. Seems he's put two and two together: since someone was roaming the complex covertly, and Williams was known to be outside, Williams must be the spy! Williams denies it and asks to leave the island, laying out two of Han's henchman as evidence of sincerity. Han fights him himself, and he turns out to be deceptively good; he knocks Williams through several walls and ends up killing him. It turns out he has a secret weapon: one of his gloved hands is metal. (Aha -- the old Gloved Metal Hand gambit!)

Han then talks to Roper, but in a much less adversarial way. He ushers him through his personal museum of armor and hands -- metal hands, wooden hands, bladed hands, and a complete hand skeleton (which he refers to as a "souvenir"). He takes Roper into the underground complex, showing him the opium cooking, the slave girls in their cells, and a big group of homeless men that Han has collected for no discernable purpose (see below). Han knows of Roper's debts, and wants him to join up as Han's U.S. rep. Roper seems to be seriously considering the offer, until he sees Williams' body suspended over a pool of water. Apparently it's some sort of test on Han's part, although I don't know what purpose it serves; displaying someone's dead friends is not listed as a sure-fire technique in *How To Win Friends and Influence People*.

That night, Lee goes out on the prowl again, using the very same hatch. Apparently Han's idea of high security is to put a cobra near that hatch; Lee simply shoves it in a bag for later.

You'd think the guards would be double careful of intruders now, but Lee still manages to sneak up on them. He passes the drugged women and the pointless men, and arrives at some sort of radio room. He clears it by releasing the cobra into the room, then uses the telegraph to send a message to Braithwaite; got the evidence, old boy!

But of course alarms go off, and Bruce spends the next twenty minutes fighting guards. This is, of course, what the movie is for -- watching Bruce Lee make monkey faces, scream in falsetto, and generally kick asses clear across the International Date Line. It's so much fun to watch, I almost forgot to catch the bad plotting. Sure, Han had a "bad experience" with a gun, so guns are disallowed on the island. That helps level the playing field. But it seems that the only alternative to guns that IS allowed is sticks. You heard me, sticks. How about some edged weapons? For that matter, how about a crossbow? Someone could take out Lee without getting close to his little whirlwind of death.

Fortunately, no one's that smart, and Lee lays out probably fifty men (including, if you look really close, an uncredited extra named Jackie Chan), but then gets trapped as steel doors drop all around him.

In the morning, Han assembles his trainees to witness Lee's destruction, and Roper is the one he handpicks to put Lee in his place. Roper finally chooses sides here, and refuses. In anger, Han sics Bolo on Roper. Now here's where this movie steps over the line from farfetched action/adventure to full-blown fantasy: Roper beats Bolo. I mean, I'm sure that John Saxon's a credible fighter and all, and I wouldn't want to face him down in a bar, but he's got nowhere near the speed or agility of any of the other contestants (with the possible exception of O'Hara, who went down so fast we never got to see his moves). There is no way in hell that Roper should have been able to beat such a mass of cruel muscle as Bolo. But hey, they didn't have me in the director's chair (which is good, because I was two years old at the time).

In the meantime, Mei Ling has snuck from Han's side into the underground complex, where she releases the cells full of homeless men.

With Bolo down, Han rages and starts siccing the rest of his trainee troops on Lee and Roper (about six at a time, calling them out by name -- nice that he knows his underlings). And naturally, Lee and Roper have no trouble sopping them up. To add to the melee, the homeless men all burst onto the scene, and from what I can see, they're at least as good at the martial arts as all of Han's trainees. (Again, the question comes up: What, exactly, was the point of having all those guys in the basement? Answer: The director needed them to even up the odds.)

Han even comes out of the stands with a claw in place of his metal hand and starts fighting Lee. Lee fights him to the point of losing the claw, at which point Han turns and runs, getting enough of a lead time to get into his museum and find a replacement: a hand with four long knife blades for fingers. Lee shows up and says, in judgement: "You killed my father. Prepare to die." Wait, that's not right. "You have offended my family, and you have offended the Shaoline temple." (You forgot the Brits, Bruce! He ticked off the Brits too!)



So now the famous end battle begins, first through the museum and then into the adjoining room, the famous hall of mirrors. This is the stunning sequence that everyone has seen clips of at least once: Lee and Han, prowling among thousands of reflected images, unsure of which is real and which an illusion. I can say, it must have been hell to film; I watched and watched, and didn't see a single camera or crew reflection. It's such a visual treat that I almost forgot my big critique -- almost. Question is, why would Han have such a maze? Does he like playing hide and see with his concubines? And wouldn't he have some sort of master plan memorized, so that he doesn't stumble around like as confused as Lee? (Lee also demonstrates the marvelous martial-arts skill of not bleeding. I mean, Han slashes him several times with these super-sharp finger thingies, and all it leaves is red lines which apparently coagulate immediately.)

I know, I'm a party-pooper.

Finally, Lee hits on the brilliant idea of smashing the mirrors as he goes to he can distinguish the reflection from the real thing. (It's a Zen thing, see -- removing the enemy's illusion to reveal the truth.) He ends up killing Han by impaling him on a pike stuck through the wall.

Above, on ground level, the fight is over, with the homeless guys pushing around the few remaining trainees. Roper looks with sadness at Tania's body lying on the side. Remember, they had this whole relationship and stuff? Oh, the humanity. Lee comes back up, and he and Roper share a silent moment of camaraderie before the British choppers finally show up.

Now, I want to point out a matter of peripheral interest. Director Robert Clouse used his credit on *Enter the Dragon* as his selling point for the rest of his career (his last movie was in 1992, and he died in 1997). Even such tripe as *China O'Brien 2* (1991) bears the caption "From the Director of Enter the Dragon" on the video box. Rather than be an inducement to rent, this should be seen as a warning to renters: If the director's claim to fame is almost twenty years ago, what does that tell you? That he hasn't done anything nearly so good since, which means that the good movie was probably a fluke, which means there's no guarantee of quality here. In this case, the success of *Enter the Dragon* can be laid squarely to the credit of Bruce Lee, in spite of Clouse's direction. It was a good note for Bruce to go out on, and the beginnings of a fruitful (if not over-laden with quality) genre: the American-made martial arts film.

**Enter the Fat Dragon (Hong Kong, 1978: Sammo Hung)** - Ah Lung (Sammo Hung Kam-Bo) is a pig farmer, a bit of a country bumpkin like Bruce Lee's character in *Way of the Dragon* and he also dresses and acts similar to Bruce's character, he is not quiet Bruce Lee clone but more a fan of Bruce's. He goes to the city by a boat to working at his uncle's restaurant, but when he arrives, he soon finds himself defending off a gang of thugs who are causing trouble in the restaurant but fighting them only makes the matter worse than ever. Later he finds that the same gang is going to kidnap a woman he works with.

An interesting moment is when he ends up on a film set and fights a Bruce clone and this clone over doing it a bit and then Sammo ends up do some of the best on screen Bruce cloning without actually trying to be Bruce but a fan and says "Bruce Lee" his "hero." The end fights start first with Lung fighting Lee Hoi San who is playing a black man which is probably meant to be a bit like a Kareem Abdul-Jabbar clone he also fights white guy probably meant be like a Chuck Norris clone but he's a boxer instead of Karate fighter, and Leung Kar Yan plays a Kung Fu fighter but with his trademark beard he kind of looks like the Italian who says "mama mea" in *Way of the Dragon*.

Contents good fights from the opening with an against the red style at the start with appearance from a few well know Hong Kong actors and stuntmen such as Yuen Biao, Mars and Meng Hoi in this against the red. Also in a typical Sammo style of comedic moments partially the bus scene. Some of the best on screen Bruce Lee impersonations.

**Enter the Game of Death (Hong Kong/South Korea, 1978, 1981: Lin Huo-hsiang, Joseph Kong)** - This was actually released in Hong Kong, unlike many of the cheaper Bruceploitation flicks, in 1981. It is somewhat of a canard to think of the Bruceploitation films as strictly a Hong Kong export when many are from Taiwan, The Philippines and/or South Korea (sometimes with Hong Kong money though.) But regardless of where they came from they are usually bad with some exceptions like *Tower of Death*. In cinema it is not an unknown trend to try to fill in the void of an actor (in this case because of Lee's death) with the most notable example similar to the Lee situation was the Charlie Chaplin clones and knock-offs in the 1910s and 1920s. Chaplin was that popular that there was a plethora of

imitators around the world, but as he went into full length movies from shorts he did not have enough for the massive demand of his films.

The episodic content makes me think it was filmed at various times. This “theory” would also help explain some of the issues with the movie. The overall plot is coherent enough. There is a MacGuffin document that is supposedly for sale to the highest bidder. Both the Germans (should have had the German in lederhosen) and the Japanese want this document as it will be a devastating blow against the Chinese (when you see how thin the document is you wonder how important could it actually be; you also wonder do people actually write all the names of spies in one document.) Bruce Lee wannabe Bruce Le plays a somewhat loner type who is finally decides to hate the Japanese because his cousin was raped and who had killed herself by biting her tongue in a most awkward scene.

But the document is hidden in a small pagoda where he has to fight increasingly easier fighters as he gets to the top. Obviously like his suit (well only obvious for fans of martial art films, I’m sure some might think this suit was an influence for *Kill Bill*) this was taken, except for the easier part, from the earlier released *Game of Death*. He starts with Lee Hoi-san whom I was completely surprised to see in a decent match of the two. Though I was rooting for Lee over Le. I will not spoil the rest, though you are in for a few shocks, some more references to Bruce Lee and probably the highlight of the film though the budget of the interior scenes is about the same as *Goodbye, Bruce Lee His Last Game of Death* (aka that’s the same room just change the sets.) Now like the princess in a Mario Bros. video game, the document was snatched just before he could get there.

Will he get the document? Will Bolo show up again and win this time? Will you finish the movie?

I feel really bad for Bolo. He is a decent martial artist and weight lifter and because of his size you feel sometimes he is only hired (besides the Bruce Lee connection) to be beat up by smaller and weaker clones of Bruce Lee. He’s like the buff guy a small guy pays to pretend to be beat up to impress the girlfriend. Here he gets the ignominious assignment of not only getting beat up by Bruce Le, but getting beat up at least twice in three fight scenes together. You think he would learn his lesson. This adds to some serious faults with an otherwise faulty film. You do not build up an antagonist like with Bolo winning most of the tournament scene until he meets Le who had previously just beaten him up (though it is kind of cool to see someone lose by a choke). This also helps ruin the later showdown between the two – that and the fact that it happens way too early.

What the hell is with that slow motion music? Those slow motion scenes were as irritating as seeing Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* (movie academia brownie points to those who know what I’m referring to, even more points if you have seen it all the way through.) Combine that with some of the undercranking, the disappearing characters, Bruce Le’s overuse of his stinky tofu face, way too many jogging scenes, a plot put together with cinematic scotch tape and you have the makings of a decent Bruce Le film – as long as you watch this after *Bruce, King of Kung Fu* (1980: Daniel Lau Tan-ching, Bruce Le) which reportedly has been useful for hard core insomniacs. But if you want to read about more faults, take a look at the cityonfire link below.

It is mentioned in several reviews and books that Steve James is in it (including Reid’s review mentioned below), but it really does not look like him (look at him in *The Exterminator* which came around the same time as this film.) When you see him fight you get the feeling that neither Bolo nor Bruce Le would have been able to beat him. You will also read many different countries where this movie belongs to. I, with some help from former member Mark, can safely say it is at least a South Korean and Hong Kong collaboration (mentioned in both KMDb and HKFA.) Now if there is any Pilipino money involved because of P.T. Insantra. Trying to find good information like this feels like a detective assignment and sometimes reading my writing feels like a school assignment.

**Enter the Invincible Hero (South Korea, 1981: Kim Si-Hyeon) – aka Dragoneer 13; Enter the Deadly Dragon** - I'd have to say that out of all the Dragon Lee movies I've seen (and I don't know if I'm ashamed or proud to say I've seen most of them), for me he's never looked as sharp and powerful as he does here. The story is your usual Dragon Lee fare - bandits terrorizing a village, damsel in distress, Lee the wandering nomad who just happens to be in the right place at the right time etc. But what makes 'Enter the Invincible Hero' a notch above his other efforts (yes, even those with Hwang Jang Lee) is the inclusion of Casanova Wong as his main opponent.

Indeed it's their penultimate one-on-one, which takes up the last 5 minutes of the extended finale, which makes me include it as part of this month's theme, but the 10 minutes that precede it certainly do their part to help. In the space of those 10 minutes, we get a 4-on-1, a 1-on-1, a 10-on-1, another 1-on-1, and a 2-on-1, before finally he gets to the Human Tornado himself. Lee remains empty handed throughout, and after wading through the initial group of 4 bandits which he does with relative ease, he enters the temple to be faced by a staff wielding, mohawk

adorned monk. Their fight is full of neat little flourishes, such as when Lee kicks the end of the staff into the ground with the monk still wielding it, then proceeds to run up it and kick the monk in the head.

After dispatching with the monk, he's quickly surrounded by 10 thugs, led by a sword brandishing villain who unfortunately I haven't been able to identify (it could be Jack Lam?). For a Korean production this sequence is done particularly well. As Lee takes out each thug with his fists and feet, the whole fight is fast, sharp, and acrobatic, conveying plenty of impact from Lee's kicks and delivering a suitably frantic feel, as they fight in and around the temple grounds. With the last thug dispatched, it segues into a one-on-one against the sword wielding villain, that has Lee mostly on the defensive as he maneuvers to avoid the strokes of the blade, before being able to unleash a barrage of his kicks, leaving his opponent in a pummeled mess on the ground.

It's here that Casanova Wong finally reveals himself, but before we can get to the main course, Lee still has to battle it out with a pair of Wong's bodybuilder bodyguards (one of whom amusingly sports an amazing afro). The bodyguards are clearly not martial artists, and have been cast due to their impressive build, which succeeds at making them look imposing, but once the action actually starts it becomes clear that this segment is going to be played for laughs, as Lee's speed is played off against their bulking slowness. It's thankfully a short bout, with little to note, other than to give credit to Lee for being able to dead lift one of the bodyguards and throw him to the ground, which must have took some physical effort!

As mentioned, the main course is the promise of a Dragon Lee vs. Casanova Wong final fight, and it gives me great joy to write that it doesn't disappoint. As I mentioned in my original review, one of the most enjoyable elements of their fight is that rare sight of seeing Dragon Lee on the defensive. Casanova Wong has a well deserved reputation of being one of the greatest kickers to grace the golden era of kung-fu movies (I dare say I'd put him a touch above Hwang Jang Lee), and his nickname of the Human Tornado was equally well deserved when witnessing the speed he delivers his kicks at. That speed is utilized to fantastic effect in his bout against Lee, with the whole fight being performed with a noticeable increase in speed and intensity than any of the previous fights (and that's far from being a dis-credit to them).

Wong unleashes his full arsenal against Lee - from a barrage of spinning roundhouse kicks to devastating front kicks - which ultimately lead Lee to get so frustrated that he rips off his shirt and gets even angrier than he already is. Another element of their fight that I enjoyed is Lee being forced to actually come up with a plan to defeat Wong, which he eventually does through aiming to concentrate his blows against Wong's foot to eliminate his kicking ability. That's not to take anything away from Lee's performance, which also throws in plenty of kicking goodness as well, including 2 nice 3-hit flying kicks.

While the end of the fight wraps up in a traditionally Korean kung-fu movie goofy way, after all the punishment Lee has endured on the receiving end of Wong's feet, it kind of feels justified, and easily stands as probably my favorite finale of any Korean kung-fu flick out there.

**Enter the Panther – (Taiwan, 1975: Hon Bo-Cheung) – aka Conspiracy** – "You saw him in EXIT THE DRAGON, ENTER THE TIGER. Now he's back and stalking his prey!" reads the tagline on the box for ENTER THE PANTHER. No better way to whet a fan's appetite than mentioning another Bruce Li classic. Sadly, this film comes nowhere near the entertaining levels of the aforementioned film. In fact, this may go down in my book as one of Li's worst films. The film opens with the discovery of gold in a small town's mining industry. Now, as we all know, money is the root of all evil so no sooner than the gold is discovered are a pair of nefarious fellows poisoning the mine's owner and forging a contract giving them the property rights. After about 25 minutes of exposition, Li finally shows up as Yu Lung, a kung fu expert who arrives to help out his uncle at his martial arts school. Naturally, he becomes embedded in the whole controversy because the man who was poisoned is somehow related to his uncle. Insert kicks to the head here.

Sorry if that plot synopsis is a bit confusing, but then again so is the film. I pride myself on being able to decipher even the most confusing film narratives, but this one takes the cake. I could not make heads or tails of what was going on plot wise. The story is all over the place. The villainous characters are trying to cover up their crime, but at the same time trying to kidnap a local girl. Trying to discern anyone's familial relationship is task as well seeing as every male character is referred to as "Uncle."

All of this storyline confusion would have been excusable if the film had some decent fight scenes. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The fights are way too brief and clumsily choreographed (making me suspect this was made earlier than the accredited 1976 date). It is not up to the level of Li's other 76 flicks and Bruce looks significantly

younger. Worst of all is the end fight scene. Bruce is able to handle groups of 5 or more lackeys with ease, but when it comes to the main bad guy, he gets his ass handed to him...REPEATEDLY! Bruce rips off his shirt in a fit of rage and charges the bad guy, only to get beat down. He gets up again and gets beat down again. This happens four or five times. Li only gains the upper hand after throwing dirt into the villain's eyes! Hey, isn't that what the bad guy's are supposed to do? The fact that the film suffers from probably the worst pan and scan job ever doesn't help much either, especially in the fight scenes.

On a positive note, the film features some great locations (or at least what you can see of them). Lush green hillsides and winding dirt roads give the movie an extra bit of ambiance that it definitely needs. The filmmakers also cribbed some amazing music for Yu Lung's theme. It is a very Southern (as in America) banjo piece with whistling over it that seems far more at place in something like THE STING rather than ENTER THE PANTHER. All in all, however, ENTER THE PANTHER is a major disappointment that I would recommend for Bruce Li completists only.

**Enter Three Dragons (Hong Kong, 1978: Joseph Kong) - aka Dragon on Fire** - Okay, so we begin with a dirty Diamond deal gone sour when the buyer, Sammy (Samuel Walls), is knocked out and relieved of the merchandise. Afraid to face his boss, Shen Ti (Chiang Tao), Sammy enlists the help of a friend, Dragon Hung (Bruce Lai, looking like Bruce Lee with thick eyebrows and a five o'clock shadow). At the airport, the guy sent to pick up Dragon Hung ends up picking up Dragon Yung (Bruce Thai, looking like Bruce Lee with mustache stubble) instead. Dragon Hung wanders around beats up some people before finally finding Sammy and his friend, Min Hung (Cheung Lik). Dragon Yung gets in a few fights and then spends the rest of the movie tied up, making one wonder why he was even included in the film in the first place. There's also Dragon Hung's brother, Bruce Hung (Dragon Lee, the unholy love child of Bruce Lee and Bolo Yeung), who'll Wander in and out of the movie until the last couple of fights.

Long story short: Sammy was betrayed by Wong (Tiger Yang), Shen Ti's main henchman. Shen Ti stages a fake Diamond deal to unmask Wong's treachery. Unfortunately, the henchman Shen employs to help him beat Wong is a double agente for another crime boss, Kao Fei (Philip Ko Fei). Everybody ends up dead. Sammy goes to Kao Fei's place to rescue Min Hung's sister, Katie. What he gets instead is a royal butt-whooping at the hands of hired muscle Bolo (gee, I wonder who plays him). So it's up to Dragon Hung and Min Hung to pick up the slack and kick the living s\*\*\* out of everybody. And yeah, Bruce Hung will eventually show up just to beat people up, especially after a Shaolin abbot of questionable virtues tells him that Buddhism teaches one to return evil for evil. And Dragon Yung will do jack s\*\*\*.

If you can ignore the confusing story, the legendarily laughable dialog, scenes that make no sense whatsoever, and everything that isn't a fight scene, you can enjoy this movie. The fights are frequente and very good, if a little cheesy and repetitive. Everybody who isn't a Bruce Lee imitator dresses and fights as if they walked off the set of a kung fu period piece. Bruce Lai/Chang Yi Tao gets the most fight scenes, and he proves to be a really good kicker. Kudos to the filmmakers for giving him an especially long fight with Bolo Yeung, who gets to show off more moves than in other films I've seen him in. Dragon Lee is hammy as usual, but he shoots off some nice kicks, especially in the last fights. Bobby Walls does an interesting mix of tae kwon do kicks and hung gar. He looks a little hunchy, probably because of the height difference, but he's a fine addition to the list of talented black actors showing up in HK cinema. Cheung Lik does the usual late 70s mix of Southern styles and is fine. And Philip Ko Fei is in fine form as the main villain, with an eclectic mix of styles presented in the mannered old school form. It takes forever to beat him, and I'm disappointed that the three Bruce Lee clones didn't triple team at the very end. From a purely kung fu point of view, this is one of the better Bruceploitation films I've ever seen. Come for the fights and stay for the wonderfully goofy dubbing.

**Escape, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Peter Yang, Florence Yu, Wu Min-Hsiung) - The Great Escape** - Peter Yang Kwan stars as an army general at the time of the Chinese revolution. The story is hard to follow and doesn't quite make sense. He is being guarded by the rest of the army for fear he will go to Shanghai as a revolutionary. Yet when the revolutionaries intervene to allow him to escape he doesn't. He even turns in another revolutionary. Chia Ling is a Chinese opera star. The army hires her to watch him but she gets romantically involved. Finally she helps him escape. Overall the action is sparse and certainly not her best. I can only recommend this movie to Chia Ling completists (who else would watch it or even know about it nowadays?) and rate it below average.

**Evidence (Hong Kong, 1974: Chang Yang)** - Kim Jin Pal plays an investigator for an insurance company who must investigate about a fire in a factory and he must protect a witness called Cheng Wen Chi (if I understood well ; since

the subtitles were out of synchronization during at least 1/3 of the movie...). This guy discovers that the boss of the factory has paid one of his men in order to put the fire to the factory and he records the phone call between the two men and sends it to the police.

Meanwhile, he is killed by the boss' men and they kidnap his fiancée (Michelle Yim), who is Charles Heung's sister.

Charles comes back from the States in order to discover what happened to his sister and he discovers that his girlfriend (Ting Pei) is the boss of a bar and seems to know much more than she says regarding the disappearance of Michelle.

He meets Kim Jin Pal and they become friend, and they also become friends with a black man who has witnessed Michelle's kidnapping and is chased by the bandits.

They finally find out where Michelle is, they discover that Ting Pei has been with the boss of the factory during all the years Charles was studying in the States and after a lot of fights, they finally succeeds in arresting all the bandits, thanks to Ting Pei who has called the police and has decided to give up being an accomplice of the bandits as soon as she has discovered that Michelle was Charles' sister.

It seems to me that there are at least two cut scenes during the first half of the movie and there are a few pixels during the last fight, but the movie is still watchable.

That's a very good movie, with a good plot and Charles Heung and Kim Jin Pal's fights are excellent. Worth watching.

**Evil Hits Evil (Taiwan/South Korea, 1983: Lan Wei-Han)** - If you're going to watch a horror movie, then one which credits its director as Lucifer Lai Wen-Hsiang is as good a place to start as any. In what appears to be his first and last time in the director's chair, Wen-Hsiang unleashed this Taiwanese and Korean co-production onto unsuspecting audiences in the wake of the kung fu horror genres revival in Hong Kong. Thanks largely to Sammo Hung's productions such as 'Encounters of the Spooky Kind' and 'The Dead and the Deadly' (which was made the year prior), movies which feature as much Taoist magic as they did toe-to-toe showdowns had become a popular trend in the early 80's. While Taiwanese and Korean productions of the same ilk were always considered a tier below their Hong Kong counterparts, that certainly never made them any less fun.

'Evil Hits Evil' brings together an eclectic cast of talent. I'm not sure if there's another movie out that that features the likes of Kwan Yung-moon, Chan Sing, Robert Tai, and Doris Lung all sharing the screen together, however Wen-Hsiang appears to have used his devilish ways to make it happen. What's perhaps more surprising though, is that he decides for the majority of the runtime to keep it a straight faced horror movie, with very little kung fu action on display. While some would, understandably, cry foul at having such talents share the screen and not fully utilise their physicality, it's certainly not the first instance of kung fu stars branching out into horror territory. Shaw Brothers stars Ti Lung and Lo Lieh famously paired up for 'Black Magic' and its sequel, and Philip Ko found himself front and center of the madness that is 'The Boxer's Omen', made the same year as 'Evil Hits Evil'.

The plot opens with Kwan Yung-moon arriving home to find his parents murdered by a group of six assassins, which includes an axe wielding strongman with a mohawk, and a crossdresser. The assassins have been sent by a respected government official played by Chan Sing, who couldn't tolerate Yung-moon's lowly woodcutter harbouring a crush towards his daughter, played by Doris Lung. Yung-moon also ends up being beaten and left for dead, however once he dies his spirit is unable to rest and returns to seek vengeance, which he does via possessing the body of another woodcutter played by Alan Lau, a mainstay of many 70's and 80's Taiwanese movies.

All of this takes place in the opening few minutes, after which Lau becomes the plots main focus, with Yung-moon not appearing again until we get 50 minutes in. While fans of the Mad Korean will no doubt be disappointed by his prompt exit, his presence continues to be felt via Lau's possessions, and when he does reappear it's certainly worth it. As I mentioned, Wen-Hsiang chooses to focus on the horror element for most of the run-time, which actually serve to make 'Evil Hits Evil' a refreshing piece of old-school Asian spookiness. Lau looks genuinely tormented whenever Yung-moon possesses his body, as he scratches his head wildly and the camera distorts the image onscreen. The fact that almost the whole movie takes place at night also adds to the supernatural atmosphere.

What's perhaps most interesting though is the treatment of those spirits looking to seek vengeance. Essentially once Yung-moon returns as a spirit, he's treated as much as a bad guy as Chan Sing's murderous government official.

As a spirit harassing the lives of the living, it quickly becomes apparent that he'll do anything to ensure he gets revenge, and pays little regard to those that get in his way. As an innocent everyman that gets murdered, it's an interesting tonal shift that suddenly sees him become a bad guy on equal footing with the character that had him murdered, and one that it appears as an audience we're supposed to willingly accept. Such a turn in events is also likely the origin of the movie's English title, 'Evil Hits Evil'.

The arrival on the scene of a Taoist master, played with an energetic gusto by Robert Tai, leads to a series of Taoist rituals being conducted to try and remove Yung-moon's spirit from Lau's body, one which allows us the pleasure of briefly enjoying a Yung-moon vs. Tai face off. Unfortunately the introduction of a fake Taoist master trying to make a quick buck (think Richard Ng in 'Mr. Vampire Part 3'), leads to a jarring comedic shift which threatens to derail the whole production. The scene involving the fake master and his assistant is overly long and a torturous affair to get through, but thankfully it doesn't last, and the characters exit the movie as quickly as they entered it.

There are a couple of other comedic scenes thrown into mix, almost as if there was a comedy quota that had to be fulfilled, which stick out like a sore thumb amongst the darkness of the rest of the plot (both literally and figuratively). In one scene a pair of bandits attempt to mug a passer-by, one of them brandishing a pair of nunchucks, and the other tasked with keeping their pet Pug on a leash. Yes, before Pugs became the subject of countless Instagram accounts, one of them played a pet to a pair of bandits in a 1983 horror movie. The bandits ultimately end up being chased by a much bigger dog, which amusingly bites the arm of one of them. He then proceeds to try and get the dog to unlock its jaws by spinning in circles, but only ends up swinging it around by its teeth, like a canine version of an Olympic hammer throw. Dog lovers will likely not be impressed.

I would argue that these scenes could well have been filmed separately by Nam Gi-nam in Korea, who's listed as the director on the Korean Movie Database. Gi-nam acted as a co-director on many Korean co-productions throughout his career, including the likes of 'New Fist of Fury', 'The Clones of Bruce Lee', and 'Ninja in the Dragons Den', so this kind of arrangement was certainly one that wouldn't be new to him. The character that really steals the show could also be Korean, as frustratingly she's not listed on any of the usual online movie databases. Later in the movie a female Taoist master shows up, dreadlocked, heavily tattooed, and wearing what can best be described as a fur leotard. Whoever she is, her character certainly leaves a lasting impression, especially in one particular scene in which she proceeds to do the splits while levitating above the ground.

It's this mysterious female master who eventually coaxes Yung-moon to show himself, which leads to an entertaining showdown that involves him kicking someone's head off (for the second time in his career, the first attempt belonging to 'Kung Fu Zombie'), as well as witnessing him chewing the glass of a fluorescent light stick. Don't ask how a fluorescent light stick ended up in a movie set during this era, but I have a feeling it was included for the simple reason to see Yung-moon eating it. During his martial arts demonstrations, Yung-moon would often smash a pair of fluorescent light sticks over his head, and then proceed to eat the glass of the smashed stubs like they were chicken legs. He wasn't called the Mad Korean for nothing.

Yung-moon also gets to finally unleash some of his trademark kicks during the showdown, ensuring that those that have clocked in purely for his presence can leave feeling satisfied. Often in 'Evil Hits Evil' though it's the smaller details leave a lingering impression. The inclusion of a black crow, that follows Lau around whenever he's possessed, pre-dates the same concept that was used in Brandon Lee's fateful final movie by a whole decade, and who wouldn't be entertained by watching steam come out of Robert Tai's head? Throw in re-animated zombies, grizzly makeup transformations, and some worthy death scenes (the final scene with Yung-moon is a killer, pun intended), and while 'Evil Hits Evil' is far from the best horror Asia has to offer, it's still a whole lot of fun.

**Excelsior (Hong Kong, 1974: Wu Min-Hsiung)** - The story begins with two young boys (brothers in flesh or brothers in friendship ?) who have a domino tattoo on their arm. They are so poor that they rob some food to eat. The younger one is hurt on his left arm and succeeds in escaping, while the older one is caught.

10 years later, the older one (Chang Yi) has been adopted by a policeman and he is now a detective in the police bureau, while the younger one (Ray Lui) has been adopted by the owner of a casino (Miao Tien) who is associated with a smuggler (Lu Feng) in a drug smuggling (but Ray Lui isn't aware of that).

While investigating on the casino, Chang Yi recognizes Ray Lui and each of them tries to better know the adopted father of the other. But this situation doesn't please Lu Feng, who imagine to kill the policeman and frame Ray Lui in order that Chang Yi believes that it's him who killed his adopted father, and hence, Lu Feng gets rid of the two brothers. Fortunately, his plan doesn't work and then he kills Miao Tien and tries to kill the two brothers.

What a superb non stop action movie, with a very good plot and great fights! I was used to see Chang Yi in wu xia pian movies, but now that I saw Excelsior and Superfoot, I'm becoming more and more a fan of his. Chang Yi and Ray Lui are really excellent in this movie, which deserves a 10/10 !

**Executioners From Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1977: Lau Kar-Leung)** - I didn't think I'd ever seen this, but in fact I have, though it's been many years. Lo Lieh stars as the Priest Pai Mei, who has an invincible body style, able to even retract his genitals, and move his weakest chi point around his body. Hong Xi Guan (Chen Kuan-Tai) is a Shaolin student, whose teacher (played in the opening credits by Lee Hoi-Sang) was murdered by Pai Mei. He is a practitioner of the **Tiger** style. He and his fellow students go on the lam, and eventually meet up with some performers, one of which is Fang Yung Chun (Lily Li-Li), who is a **Crane** stylist. Eventually they marry and have a son Hong Wen Ding (Wong Yu). Hong is determined to get revenge, and spends 10 years training. Defeated, he spends another 7 years, only to lose again. His wife has begged him to learn her Crane style to combine with his Tiger style, but he refuses, thinking it unconscionable to mesh the two. He even refuses to train his son, as he is learning from his mother. Of course, Wen Ding does learn his father's Tiger style, pieced together from a torn up manual, to avenge the death of his father in the end.

The fights are rampant in this, as are the training sequences. Fortunately, the corny humor is kept to a minimum. Chen is fantastic in his display of the Tiger style, demonstrating its strength and power, though he really doesn't do much kicking in this. Still, there's some great footwork. Lily Li-Li mainly displays her Crane style most prominently in the beginning, and it appears to be mixed with a little **Wing Chun**. I would've liked to have seen more of this from her. There's some weapons fighting thrown in, particularly Chen using a staff, and even taking on Pops, who wields a 3 sectional staff in a cameo.

With all the fighting the film contains, the best 2 are those when Hong and Pai Mei take on each other. Pai Mei keeps stating he is better versed in Tiger style, but he never really resorts to it. He seems to rely mainly on what appears to be standard Kung Fu. Still, these 2 fights allow Chen to use all that he demonstrated in his training as Hong. They're solid and enjoyable, though nothing mind-blowing. Honestly, I was quite disappointed with the end fight. You would think Wen Ding would resort to combining the Crane & Tiger styles, but he never does. No, he relies mainly on what little Tiger he absorbed from his father's tattered manual. Thus, he comes across as a bit bumbling, and his defeat of Pai Mei seems more happenstance than skilled determination. Bogus.

The movie is good, better than most, with a fairly standard plot, but I wouldn't consider it one of Pops' best. The depictions of Tiger & Crane are served well, with Tiger really being in the forefront, but again, I think there are films that showcase the style better. Personally, as good as this is, I don't know that I really care if I ever see it again. Yes, this is the film that introduces the Pai Mei character, versions of which became quite popular as the "go to" villain standard, but that and Chen Kuan-Tai's use of the Tiger style is about all that it has going for it.

**Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger (Taiwan, 1976: Lee Tso-Nam) – aka Bruce Lee: The Star of all Stars** - I bought this out of curiosity more than anything else as I'd haven't seen a Bruce Li film for over 15 years and couldn't remember much about them. It's purely exploitative of course but not as bad as I was expecting and despite being more than a little corny in places it is still quite entertaining.

Bruce Li plays a protégé of Bruce Lee who suspects foul play in his master's death. With the help of a journalist he uncovers a triad plot to blackmail Bruce into smuggling drugs (!!!). With this information Bruce Li sets out on a trail of vengeance that eventually leads him to the big boss (Chang Yi) behind it all.

While he didn't have anything like the onscreen presence of Bruce Lee, Li is still very capable at making martial arts look good on screen. This is born out by a quite a number of entertaining fight scenes in the movie. His kicking techniques especially were quite impressive. Of course in all of the fights Li is imitating Bruce Lee's mannerisms and isn't too bad, unfortunately obvious undercranking often ruins the effect.

There's a few scenes where the imitation is taken too far though, especially where Bruce Li disguises himself as a telephone repairman (as in Fist of Fury) complete with thick rimmed glasses. The film also gets quite laughable in places; one such scene is where Li is mistaken for Bruce Lee when a number of fans see him stood next to a picture of the real thing. They look nothing alike!!!

**Face Behind Mask, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Chen Chi-Hwa)** - One of the very best movies Rarescope unearthed for release on dvd, the excellent cast, plentiful action and a truly engaging trip down familiar plotting makes The Face Behind Mask a previously lost winner. Yueh Hua, Hsu Feng and Lo Lieh play characters that are in the service of clan leader Chi Tien-Wei and have to spend their days as assassins or avoiding sneaky attempts on Chi's life. The opposition always hide arrows in boxes with decapitated heads or use deadly, projectile hands but this trio usually saves the day. It does become clear there might be a spy within the clan though and the attempts at sniffing the one out results accusations directed towards the wrong person...

In the best of ways combining a first half with non-stop swordplay and a second of mystery and intrigue, director Chen Chi-Hwa (Snake And Crane Arts Of Shaolin) isn't providing newly thought of material but the simplicity of the beats is a great tool. It just goes to prove that if you put effort in aspects outside of production- and action-design, you can make this often made genre stand out quite a bit. Combining the excellent presences of its trio of stars is a major factor as well, with top honors going to Lo Lieh.

**Fantasy Mission Force (Taiwan, 1983: Chu Yin-Ping)** - I don't know if any of you out there have ever actually felt your brain melt, but if you have, you know what it's like to experience the acid trip that is Fantasy Mission Force. Jimmy was definitely on that brown acid when he dreamed up this crackpot film, and thank god for whatever drugs the man was doing. I love this film! Some people can't seem to get it through their little pea brains that it is a slapstick comedy, and they laugh at how the film-makers thought they were making a serious action-adventure film. But it has flying Amazons, vampires, and Abraham Lincoln in it!

Anyway, almost as wacky and convoluted as the film itself is the story of how up and coming martial arts star Jackie Chan came to be in the film. Keep in mind that much of this is conjecture, wild accusation, conspiracy theory, and half-truth. It sure is interesting though.

Back in the day, Jackie was working for Seasonal Entertainment and director Lo Wei. Lo Wei was the guy who directed Bruce Lee's three films before Enter the Dragon. Wild rumor had it that Lo Wei, a notorious thug and triad member, was furious that Lee dissed him to go to America and make Enter the Dragon. Thus more than a few people believe that Lee was murdered and Wei's goons were responsible.

So fast forward a few years. Jackie Chan is saddled with the task of being "the next Bruce Lee," despite the fact that Lee and he are totally different types of fighters making totally different types of movies. But they both worked for Lo Wei. Chan was getting sick of toiling away in Seasonal flops like To Kill With Intrigue, though he did make some great films at the time. Lo Wei's vehicles simply were not taking the young star where he wanted to go.

When Chan was approached by a Taiwanese company with the chance to work with Yuen Wo-ping on Snake in the Eagle's Shadow and Drunken Master, he jumped at it, and jumped ship. Once again, Lo Wei's star had ditched him for greener pastures, and once again, Lo Wei was fuming. Again, speculation claims that Lo Wei sent thugs to Hong Kong to kill Jackie Chan, but Jackie was protected by the local movie star triad thug of Taiwan, Jimmy Wang Yu. Yep, they claim that the ol' one-armed swordsman, who of course has two arms, fought off a whole bunch of Lo Wei's men.

Chan now owed his life to Wang Yu, and Jimmy took it out in trade, calling on Jackie's growing name to inflate interest in some of Jimmy Wang Yu's own films. Jimmy's star was well down the path toward waning, so adding Jackie to the list of cast members was a sure-fire way to guarantee the aging Jimmy Wang Yu a decent return on his films. Thus, you get Jackie showing up in Wang Yu films like this and Island of Fire.

Like I said, take that shit with however many gains of salt you devote to the tabloids. One thing is for certain, and that's that Chan must have owed something pretty heavy to Jimmy Wang Yu to show up in some of those films.

Fantasy Mission Force is the best of the bunch, and definitely the weirdest damn thing Chan has ever done. He's not exactly a member of the main cast, but he keeps popping up, along with Cheung Ling, as a whimsical con-man. He shows up in the end to have a grand duel with Jimmy Wang Yu and his army of Chevy-driving neo-Nazi Chinese skinheads.



That right there should clue you in on what sort of movie this is. Plot? Jimmy Wang Yu is a super soldier who assembles a team of misfits and renegades for a suicide mission. Yeah, familiar plot. Their mission is to rescue the leaders of the Allied Powers during World War II, all of whom have been captured by Nazis. One of the leaders is Abraham Lincoln. They are being held in Luxemborg, Canada. Jimmy Wang Yu has to go because Rambo, Snake Plisskin, and Baldy (Karl Maka's character from the Aces Go Places films) were all busy.

Jimmy soon fakes his death and is revealed to secretly be the leader of the Nazis, all of whom drive long pimpmobile Caddies or something with swastikas spray-painted all over them. Curiously enough, Chinese nazi skinheads also figure prominently into the plot of Flash Future Kungfu. I don't know if that's a whole subgenre, but you can bet your ass I will investigate further.

Along the way to saving the leaders, the ragtag band (one of whom is a young Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia) encounters flying Amazons with magic powers, vampires and ghosts, and other things you would typically think of when you think about World War II films. There are frequent battles, Jackie Chan shows up to do some kungfu, and in the end he and Cheung Ling drive some bulldozers around.

By the time this film was over, I was weeping sweet tears of joy. I mean, someone thought of this. Even in the dead of summer in Florida, living in a squalid apartment on the edge of a swamp with no air conditioning, my nightmarish heat hallucinations never even came close to the level of pure nirvana this film helps me attain. Fuck drugs. All you need is Fantasy Mission Force. Were you thinking of piercing your nipples with buffalo bones, taking peyote, and seeing visions in the sweat lodge? Why bother when you can watch Fantasy Mission Force?

I've seen a lot of shit. I've seen movies featuring muppets doing hardcore sex scenes and cumshots. I've seen movies where an evil dwarf kidnaps young virgins and chains them in his attic while his mom belts out old cabaret tunes. I've seen movies where the romantic triangle is between a man, a woman, and a corpse. I've seen damn close to everything this fucked up world has to offer, but Fantasy Mission Force still makes me scratch my head. If I watch it along with Young Taoism Fighter, I can actually travel through time and Sun Ra begins to make sense.

Fantasy Mission Force is a source of great and dangerous power. You will either learn to wield it and thus experience all the earthly delights, or it will kill you. Possibly both.

**Fatal Flying Guillotines (Taiwan, 1977: Raymond Lui)** - The first time I watched it, I came out thinking it was a rather middling affair.. After watching it again, I think it is definitely above average at the least. The plot is decent, and there is even some good acting from Carter Wong, Chen Sing, and Wong's "mom.". But the main reason I liked it is because of the fighting..

This movie is a great example that you don't need 7 Grandmaster style shapes to have entertaining fights! (Although Mark Long does have a short cameo) Carter Wong and Chen Sing both give some of their best performances, with plenty of brutal and fast paced fighting to go around. I definitely see what Ngor was talking about as Chen Sing rips, tears, and kicks the shit out of people!

This is just a cool movie. The guillotines are admittedly ridiculous, but its hilarious to see these clunky things fly through the air as Carter Wong runs for life from them. There are some really cool forest locations used too. I liked the soundtrack a lot, a lot of horror sounding tracks were used, and hey added to Chen Sings character, and really made him feel like an evil bastard.

Fun fast paced movie, glad I gave it another shot. From what I have seen, this is probably my favorite performance from Carter Wong. It is a great performance from Chen Sing, but it may be outdone by Hero's of Shaolin for me, another movie I need to revisit soon.

**Fatal Needles vs Fatal Fists (Taiwan, 1978: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Very good movie. I was very surprised by how good the characterization, story, and acting was (especially from the usually wooden Don Wong Tao). At first the plot reminded me of Awaken Punch a little with Don Wong vowing not to fight again, and going through hell before unleashing his fury.. But it ended up becoming a much more complex movie than that overall. I really liked Chang Yi's character, as a villain who is more of a smooth gangster than an evil villain..he actually tries not to kill anyone, so long as he can push his dirty business!

The heroes also challenge each other's morals, is revenge or defending friends worth additional lives, or your own values? Lo Lih doesn't last long, which sucked, but his death was a big deal, and the result was part of what makes the movie great. But he and Don Wong seemed to have great chemistry, so it would have been cool to see more. The abrupt kung fu movie ending was a pretty big bummer after building such a strong foundation though. The fighting was very good overall. Don Wong is his usual strong and intense self, Tommy Lee really shined and showed great kicks, and another good finale between Don Wong and Chang Yi.. With that said this isn't really a fight movie, the fighting takes a back seat to the good plot.

This is simple stuff for a normal flick, but great stuff in an indie kung fu movie. Great Lee Tso Nam movie. I am really growing more fond of Don Wong and Chang Yi the more I see their collaborations. Really good characterization and plot. If the ending was better it could be great.

The dub was good, with a ridiculous amount of but stills, I counted three in less than 10 seconds at one time I believe! Haha, Chen Fu Hung also sports some silly fake chest hair, it basically looks like they taped a wig between his man boobs!

**Fate of Lee Khan, The (Hong Kong, 1973: King Hu)** - To watch this film on such a poor quality video as I did is nearly a travesty. The colors were faded, the film was cropped so badly that most of the subtitles were cut off on both the left and right side. When this wasn't occurring, the subs often fell below the screen. What I would give to see this film in a widescreen format with a clean print because even with all these defects it was still a wonderful film. This film directed by King Hu is considered one of the classics of Chinese cinema.

This film is masterful in the way that it slowly builds layers of drama and tension around a fairly simple plot. Hu creates a beautifully textured rendering of a time set in the Mongol dynasty by using authentic sets and a wonderful assortment of character actors. Due to the inability to often read the sub-titles, I must admit to not being entirely clear as to some of the plot complications.

The basic story line though is that Lee Khan, a Mongolian prince, is coming to stay at an inn somewhere in the middle of nowhere to obtain a secret war map. The Chinese rebels learn of this and conspire to kill him and steal the map. Much of the film takes place inside the inn and the first forty-minutes of the film presents us with a myriad of interesting characters coming and going and the many activities such as gambling that take place inside. It is a fascinating glimpse, yet beneath the surface the conspiracy is slowly coming together and many of the characters are not who they seem to be. Hu's use of the tracking camera to capture all the movements that are taking place throughout the inn is superb.

The female innkeeper (Li Lihua - one of the top Chinese actresses of the 40s and 50s) is part of the conspiracy and has brought four waitresses to work at the inn. These are not four ordinary waitresses as witnessed by the fact that Angela Mao, Helen Ma (Deaf Mute Heroine) and Hu Chin are among them. They are all proficient killers. In some early sequences there are a few occasions in which they are able to showcase their skills as they twirl over table tops and balconies.

Of course the big test is Lee Khan. Finally Lee Khan(Tien Feng), shows up with his entourage of bodyguards and the deadly but beautiful Princess (Hsu Feng) at his side. Hu is in no hurry though and very slowly the tension is created – will the plot be discovered, when will they attack – to great effect. Finally the rebel's hands are forced and they must show their faces. There is no turning back.

There is a reasonable amount of fighting and kung-fu flying but taking into account the year that this was made – 1972 – it is somewhat primitive as compared to today's films. Still there is some good action and of course Angela Mao looks terrific and acrobatic in all of her scenes. The real reward here is watching a great director construct a world full of great faces, a feeling of wonderful authenticity and a story that grabs your interest and never lets go. Sammo Hung was the director of action according to Bey Logan's book HK Action Cinema.

**Fearless Duo (Hong Kong, 1978: Joseph Kuo) - a.k.a The Incredible Three, Fearless Master Fighter** - Classic Martial Arts action all the way from the team of veteran director Joseph Kuo (*The 7 Grandmasters*) & Fong Chiung (*The Rebellious Reign*). The late seventies saw the start of the Kung Fu comedy craze, kicked off by the huge success of *Drunken Master* (1978). *Fearless Duo* even shares the same villain in the form of Mr Super Legs himself Taekwondo expert Hwang Jang Lee. While not all of these movies are must see's like *The Victim* (1980). This Jia's Motion Picture (H.K) Co. production is an exception and is certainly worth tracking down if you like crisp flowing fight action that

packs a punch. The comedy didn't bother me all that much here and some of it is actually funny. This is mostly down to the superb old school 1970's dub job that really suits the mood of this movie.

At which point Ah Sam comes wondering around the corner and kicks over the stone. Luckily for him he is saved by a Martial Arts expert played superbly by Wang Han-Chen(Dynamo). That sequence really sets up the tone of the film really well.

Actor Ho Chi-Wai(My Lucky Stars) does a really fine job of directing the fight scenes for this film. What makes this more amazing is the fact this was his first time performing the duty of fight choreographer. He would only perform this role one more time for the movie The Loot(1980), which is baffling when you see the action on display here. Sure he might not be Lau Kar Leung or Sammo Hung but he clearly had a talent for this kind of thing. It would have been interesting to see how his style would have developed into the eighties. The pair of sisters played by Yuen Qui(Dreanought) and Yuen Chu come close to stealing the film from fellow star Lau Ga-Yung. It's really good to see two very capable female screen fighters paired together in one movie. Yuen Chu in particular really impressed me with her excellent ability to perform the shapes style of fight action. It amazes me that she only ever made one more movie appearance in The Young Hero(1980). Having never seen her in that film I cant compare her only two performances. It would nice to know more about her and what Martial/Performing Arts she was actually trained in.

Yuen Qui on the other hand is still active in the film industry today with a recent role in Sammo Hung's My Beloved Bodyguard. I'd certainly recommend this film if you like to see strong and prominent female roles in your Martial Arts movies. Getting back to the fight scene's by Ho Chi-Wai he really makes the most of Hwang Jan Lee's talents. That said he doesn't feature heavily in the film and only has three encounters in total. While it would have been nice to see him appear more frequently in the story. What few scenes we are treated to are yet another excellent showcase for the Korean born master. One of the stand out moments for me being when we see him fight one of the sisters husbands. We are treated to a cameo by Tino Wong(Hitman In The Hand Of Buddha) and the two have a brief but blazing duel. This scene is all we see of the two sisters family being killed. As you can imagine the story is by far the weakest part of this production, but it works well enough despite being a little vague in parts. We also get a cameo from Chan Lau(The Dragon The Hero) who makes an appearance as part of a pair of sword wielding assassins.

The finale is certainly the big high light of the film with Hwang Jang Lee turning up with his two bodyguards. I think the two heavies might be played by Kuo Kai & Yeung Hung?, but I'm not 100% certain so don't quote on that one. Earlier in the movie we get to see Yuen Chu & Yuen Qui display some of their decent staff/double sticks skills. We allowed to see more of ladies weapons based talents in the final action packed showdown. Lau Ga-Yung also get to prove himself here after spending a lot of the movie getting beaten up. He's certainly a talented performer but sadly spends most of his time acting like he doesn't know any Martial Arts at all. Which is a skill in itself really, but it also means he doesn't look as proficient as some of the other cast members.

While I did enjoy this movie a lot, there are still you still some very random and odd moments thrown into the mix. The best example of this involves a pair of randy ghosts that add some eye brow raising comedy to the story. Yes that's right two sex starved spirits appear in a two short interludes to our heroes daily training. Without going into too many details lets just say one sequence involving the male ghost will leave you speechless. The story involving the two ladies and The Ghost Faced Killer could also have been done a little better. You don't get told why he's kills their family and even the deed itself is never actually seen. Maybe some of the story was lost in the translation and the dubbing didn't stay true to original plot entirely?. Even for a low budget picture such as this one we could have done with a little more detail.

Overall I'd recommend this as a must see for fans of comedy Kung Fu. If you are fan of the cast members its also more than worth picking this title up. For fans of both you are in for a real treat. The film might not be up there with Knockabout(1979) or other such highly regarded Kung Fu comedies. Yet it does feature some classic fight action and some very talented Martial Artists. Hwang Jang Lee may only have three fights scenes but there certainly show him at top of his game. Wang Han-Chen puts on a great performance playing the pipe loving Master too. Bruceploitation fans will recognize him from Dynamo where he played Ho Chung Tao's eccentric mentor equally well. The film also features a pretty original soundtrack unless they used tracks from other movies that I'd never heard before?. Certainly a plus at time when the genre loved to recycle Hollywood, Italian and its own music scores.

**Fearless Fighters (Taiwan, 1971: Mo Man-Hung)** - Quick, efficient, to the point and with no unnecessary dialogue, Fearless Fighters is one of the very best Wuxia pieces of its kind, providing terrific energy, creative weaponry and only running 82 minutes. There's a good explanation though as to why all of a sudden a production such as this got polished and streamlined. It was a 1971 film originally but picked up in 1973 by Richard Ellman's independent

distribution company. Dubbed and re-edited, *Fearless Fighters* went on to become a noticeable success in the relatively early days of exposure of this genre to American audiences. The now less complex movie features some simple strands of clan feud, betrayal, deceit and a case of gold but what a continually exciting blast it is. Mo Man-Hung (director of fan favourite *Stormy Sun*) lets the action speak, something that could've gone on a dull repeat but there's a seemingly endless creative force behind the film. Crude creativity but creativity nonetheless. As it's mainly a weapons movie and the US movie poster rightly showcased the versatile range we're about to witness, it's a decision paying off as we see the usual poisonous darts, flying hats but also crippled fighters with sneaky weapons, assassins dressed as vampires, whips, twin swords and more. Chen Hung-Lieh (*Come Drink With Me*) walks away with the highest honor in cool as the twin sword master.

**Fearless Hyena (Hong Kong, 1979: Jackie Chan)** - The film opens with the introduction of the villain, Yen Ting Hua, and his 3 henchmen as they run down a man and murder him.

Chan plays Shing Lung. He and his grandfather have recently relocated to another town. His grandfather teaches him a secret form of kung fu and explicitly instructs Chan to never fight so as not to reveal it. One of my favorite parts of this film is a training exercise with staffs. The grandfather puts Chan through his paces forcing him to recite the names of movements: "Rabbit, broken thread, tree, cloud, fisherman, flying phoenix, flute player, tiger's tail, iron gate, iron wall, shooting star" (just to name a few).

Of course, Chan doesn't listen and after a skirmish with some local ne'er-do-well's who introduce him to their master, he throws in with them in starting a fake kung fu school as their enforcer for money.

Chan has 3 fights right off the bat against challengers to the "school" --- 2 dressed as a cross-eyed scamp and 1 dressed in drag against a strongman type.

It is in the latter fight that his grandfather arrives and discovers what he's been up to and Chan runs away. The villain, Hua, arrives having heard of the great fights. He seeks out Chan's grandfather even encountering a despondent Chan along the way who points him in the right direction. Hua finds the grandfather and kills him because of a long time clan feud. A cripple, who has followed at the sight of Hua, prevents Chan from interfering or running off immediately for revenge. Instead he takes Chan in and trains him.

This is a great part of the film which has the classic 'chopstick fu' scene, a severe training sequence, and the classic 'jar-walking' drill scene.

Chan runs into Hua in town and attacks him in anger and grief. He is severely beaten and the cripple arrives to save him by begging forgiveness. He then teaches Chan a new style of kung fu based on emotions (joy, anger, sorrow, happiness) and there is a really cool 'form' sequence depicting this. I love stuff like this and you just don't see it now-a-days in the kung fu movies we get.

Later, the 3 henchmen attack the cripple. Chan arrives to save him. The henchmen each use a short staff spiked on one end and with a folding 24 inch blade on the other end that locks into place. (Again there is the classic scene where snips of hair are sliced from Chan's head as he agilely evades the assault of blades.) Finally, Chan faces Hua and uses the 'emotional' kung fu to defeat him.

Chan's comedic choreography and agility are truly on display and this is one of his best movies for that. He is an amazing performer. Watching this now (and I bet it's been 12 yrs. or so since I saw it last), it left me feeling sad at times. He can't do this kind of stuff anymore and no one else is doing it today period. We don't get training sequences or displays of shapes and forms like we used to from films of the 70's. I miss that. I want more of that, dadgummit! For me, that was the soul of a good kung fu movie. (And this isn't meant to be a diss but "The 5 Deadly Venoms" could really have used some of this.)

**Fearless Young Boxer (Hong Kong, 1979: Jimmy Shaw) -aka Method Man aka Avenging Boxer** - How do the fights STILL get better every time I watch it? The story is pretty bad. Casanova Wong plays a killer. The first 50 minutes are a chore to get through and I feel like turning off the TV every time Lee Kwan appears. The movie starts out ok with Casa Wong vs Lung Fei but the only real highlight during the first half is the training scenes. Our lead actor Peter Chang does some training with bricks that you have to see to believe. Finally in the second half we start getting fight after fight and it's a martial arts explosion.

First is a warm up fight between Peter Chang and the villain Casa where they test each other's skills.

Next is Casa vs funny man Chan Wai Lau. But there's nothing funny about this fight. Casa does some of the most vicious kicks I've seen from him and Chan Wai Lau is fast and fierce using a pipe as a weapon.

Next is one of the more unique fights that I've come across. A character named Stumpy (Phillip So) has a valuable item in his possession, and Casa wants it from him. What's unique here is that it isn't really a fight, it's a thrilling and funny chase scene, with a little bit of fighting. "You can't catch me, cause my name's Stumpy!"

Chia Kai vs Wong Wing Sang- talk about a dream matchup. This is pretty much as good as it gets. A few of the highlights are the secret finger technique, Chia Kai doing a cartwheel off a wall onto a wobbly table and Wong Wing Sang throwing a real knife at Chia Kai and Kai barely dodging it.

Chia Kai vs Casa- shapes man vs superkicker. Another dream matchup that delivers the goods.

Peter Chang and Hwa Ling vs Casa- I have to give credit to the filmmakers here for putting together a final fight that tries to top all other final fights. It's 11 minutes of nonstop action and some of the highest quality choreography I've ever seen.

**Female Chivalry (Taiwan, 1974: Yang Ching-Chen)** - I've seen about 20 of Judy Lee's films, and this one is my overwhelming favorite. I'll admit that the plot is a trifle, the production values are minimal, and the dramatic tension is nil. Visually, the film is very drab, with very little color in the costumes and sets. And, since she's dressed like a man, we don't even get to see her all dolled up.

But what do we want from female kung fu films? I know what I value the most:

(1) The heroine should fight unarmed. (Weapons are equalizers, largely reducing the size and weight advantage of male opponents. So when a female can defeat her male opponents using only her hands and feet, it is much more impressive and enjoyable.)

(2) There should be a minimum of camera tricks, so that the fighting seems firmly grounded in reality. (A minimum of hidden trampoline jumps, reverse-projection jumps, wire work, clipped frames, or anything else which makes the action seem fake and unreal.)

(3) The heroine should be able to defeat her opponents unassisted by anyone else. (She particularly should not need a partner to "gang up" on the main bad guy.)

(4) The fight choreography should be smooth and well-done.

(5) The heroine should be empowered and in full control of her own destiny.

In "Female Chivalry", all of these criteria are fully met. Judy is THE star, and is in total control every moment she is on screen. All of her fighting is unarmed, and she uses no camera tricks during any of her fights. The other hero in the film, Barry Chan, is presented as clearly inferior to her (most of his victories are won by bribing his opponents to lose!), and the film's climactic battles are hers alone. During the film, she also has two good, solid fights against big Cheng Fu Hung, and those fights are quite a contrast to Angela Mao's fight against him in "Deadly China Doll." Angela's fight with him was poorly choreographed, very unconvincing, and used lots of camera tricks (supposedly jumping over his head, etc.). Judy did it straight and did it far better. Judy's fighting, though smooth and graceful, is rather simplistic in this film and centered on her roundhouse kicks, so her fighting here looks elemental compared to her polished and stylistic fighting in some of her later films. But the choreography is handled very well. "Female Chivalry" is her most empowered hand-to-hand role that I have yet seen.

Aside from her fighting and total domination of this film, her personality here is irresistible. Spritely from start to finish, she goes through the film with an attitude of amused superiority. She's better than anybody else, and she knows it, but she doesn't strut or brag, she just quietly laughs to herself at the pitiful efforts of others, and then she easily and playfully beats them up.

Since the film is weak on plot, it depends on incident and characterization to succeed. There are over a dozen superb incidents which are scattered through the film like sparkling jewels. For example, the way Judy repeatedly plucks a chin whisker and then slaps the face of the chief robber (you have to see the gleeful expression on her face as she does this). Judy's characterization is enormously appealing and makes me want to see much more of this character. In fact, the film could serve as the prototype for a great weekly TV series.

As a film, the 5.5 rating was probably about right. But as a vehicle for July Lee, I would rate it way up at 9.0. If I had to trim my video library down to one Chia Ling film (perish the thought), this is definitely the one I would keep.

**Female Fugitive (Hong Kong, 1975: Kao Pao-Shu)** - Let's get this out of the way, the lady of the title is a serious Drug Queen, the head of operations of a heroin ring that gets chased out of Hong Kong and into Thailand. Once there, people get suspicious when two obnoxious kids accidentally stumble upon Drug Queen's major domo Chan Wai Man killing a man who was either an undercover cop or police informant (the subtitles were dodgy - hard to read on this umpteenth gen vhs sourced boot). Said kids take pictures of CHAN WAI MAN doing the deed (including a very pain inducing behind the knee / calf tearing stomp with a thick, almost platform boot heel - man, I yelled OUCH when I saw CHAN WAI MAN deliver that.) CHAN WAI MAN doesn't get the film roll back because obnoxious little boy bumped into pretty photographer tourist and their cameras get switched. So you know what happens next.

As for Drug Queen, she glowers a lot and doesn't miss a beat (and, yes, that glower and the flash of a blade makes Chan Wai Man a bit nervous... so he wasn't the cold assassin / hit man that he would soon master in *Jumping Ash* (1976) etc.) Drug Queen looks pretty cool in her 70s hats, but this really wasn't what I was expecting at all. When it comes to drug films, I am not into seeing the whole production and usage end (unless it's psychedelics because of the FX and creative visuals people try to come up with) - this film was full of heroin production and therefore there were long stretches of disinterest for me personally.

Anyway, not bad for some of the down and dirty brawling (basher, I guess), but I've seen much, much better in Chan Wai Man's output.

**Fierce Fist, The (Taiwan, 1976: Tyrone Hsu Tien-Yung)** - This a martial arts movie with jealousy as the storyline and I'm sure it is the only martial arts story about jealousy. I know the Chinese love story plot is totally different than the Western love story plot. This is my only example of a jealousy plot so I must question - Do the Chinese have a weird concept of jealousy or is this story just not told right? It begins with Chia Ling getting jealous because her boyfriend Yueh Hua always takes her for a walk in the woods past a tree where someone carved the name of a well-known beautiful and married woman. Perhaps if you are Chinese that happens often? I don't know. Then we have some remarkable coincidences. Chia Ling, dressed as a man, meets the same woman and saves her by fighting off a horny guy. Next Yueh Hua also saves her from robbers. They spend the night in a cave where Yueh Hua fights off a guy in a terrible bear costume. Filming that sequence had to be the poorest decision in the history of all movies. Back to the jealousy and now Lo Lieh, the beautiful woman's husband, thinks Yueh Hua must have boned her in the cave that night. The only one who can testify to prove it never happened is the star of 279 martial arts movies the hugely great Got Siu-Bo. Unfortunately GSB plays a deaf mute so he can't testify. This is quite a big role for the big man and though I love to make fun of him I must acknowledge the large one can act. He even gets to throw a few punches. I never said he could fight though. Speaking of fights - Yueh Hua had been making martial arts movies about ten years. He can pull off a long sequence of moves but he never advanced to the point where he ever looked like a real fighter. Lo Lieh is the real deal but in this movie it seemed he phoned it in. Chia Ling was the high point of the fight sequences. A curious thing happens about one hour into the movie. Lo Lieh is torturing Yueh Hua and two goofballs appear out of nowhere to abduct his beautiful wife. When you make a movie and start filming without a script or any idea of where you are going with a vague storyline like jealousy there comes a moment when it all goes to hell and the story line peters out or becomes too absurd to carry one. That's when two goofballs enter and you pretend you were making a screwball comedy all along. Yet, this movie doesn't even get that right. What a mess and below average rating for the year and genre.

**Fight Among the Supers (Taiwan, 1984: Wong Kwo Chu)** - With the opening credits you realise that this is not going to be yer usual kung fu movie. Rather it made me wonder 'what the hell am I watching ?' the first time I saw this in the cinema a few years ago. With Chiang Sheng and Lu Feng fighting each other with giant plates and chop sticks

and even turning into giant plates and chop sticks this is probably one of the most bizarre opening sequences I've ever seen (and also probably the most bizarre kung fu film I've ever seen). But certainly one of the most entertaining too.

Lu Feng and Chiang Sheng play the gods of plates and chop sticks respectively. With a plot highly reminiscent of Samo Hung's 'The Odd Couple', the two deities meet every ten years to determine who is the most powerful by way of a duel of kung fu and magic. However the battles always end in a draw so they each agree to take a disciple on Earth to train and fight for them instead.

The mischievous gods find two waiters, both experienced kung fu fighters, working at the same restaurant and torment them relentlessly until they agree to obey. This then fills up the first hour of the movie with some madcap and very silly (and in one instance quite politically incorrect) humour. However the skill of the actors is extremely apparent through these scenes.

The last half hour of the movie becomes a lot more conventional as a gang of thugs threaten the owner of the restaurant and kidnap his daughter. It then falls to the waiters to rescue her and although they are greatly outnumbered they have the gods on their side.

The film saves the really serious action until the last fifteen minutes or so and here it delivers in spades as the two disciples are interchanged with Lu Feng and Chiang Sheng in a superbly choreographed final battle. There are still plenty of surreal moments, in keeping with the rest of the film, but its an excellent display of acrobatics and choreography which keeps the sense of rhythm that has always been present in 'Venoms' fight scenes. Probably the most entertaining of the post Shaws Venoms movies.

**Fight for Shaolin Tamo Mystique (Taiwan, 1977: Hou Cheng) – aka Fight for Survival; Lady Wu Tang** - The Shaolin Tamo Classic books have been stolen from the temple, and it's up to Shaolin's newest student to retrieve them, Polly Shang Kuan.

I have to admit in seeking out as many Polly Kuan movies as I can get. After reading the review for this movie over on Wasted Life, I admit it caught my interest, let me point out what part of the review stood out the most, and eventually caused me to buy the VHS of this movie on Ebay. First thing, "The techniques in the manual enable the practitioner to extend their limbs at will which allows for some extremely silly moments where fighters are running around on stilts or flailing at each other with overlong arms." Second thing, "Best of all though is Polly in her skimpy costumes; bare shouldered and in hot pants!" It was given a score of a 3/5 on Wasted Life, and became an instant "must see" in my book, now here's what I thought about this movie.

This movie started off pretty strong, Polly Kuan's character desperately wanted to learn kung fu at Shaolin, but, traditionally no females are allowed into the temple, let alone being taught kung fu. Polly's character is spotted kneeling at the steps of Shaolin by two students at the temple, they then come up with the idea to get her to do their chores for them, which consist of fetching water for the temple. She agrees to do their job, for exchange of being trained kung fu at Shaolin, but these two students have no authority to make such a deal. A year has passed, and when she finally speaks to someone in a higher position at Shaolin, she is told to be on her way, females are not allowed. At this point a monk who has been living outside the temple, and someone Polly was providing water to, agreed to train her himself. It's at this point when Polly's new master finds out that the Da-Mo books he wanted to use to train his new student were stolen a year earlier, he decides his new student will be the one to go out, find the books, and bring them back to Shaolin. As simple as I made the plot sound for this movie, is exactly how simple it is to follow when watching it. Which is definitely a plus when it comes to fully enjoying a kung fu movie, or any movie for that matter.

The action in this movie really did not have anything jaw dropping, nor was it groundbreaking, but it was fun to watch. The action consisted of mostly ALL hand to hand, with very little else coming in to play. Polly looked good as ever, even when she fought with extended arms or legs she was always a joy to watch.

If you checked the CAST list above you may have noticed that Wong Tao is in this movie, and because of that you may think that there could be a chance of him winning the award for Standout Performance ... mmm .. not quite. He is barely in the movie, just a sequence at the beginning and end, more of a cameo appearance. The Standout Performance award has to go to Polly Kuan, just because I like looking at her perform. She could of been sitting on the toilet throughout the whole movie and I STILL would of thought she gave a Standout Performance... LOL.

Polly fans such as myself, you will definitely want to pick this one up. If anything, just to see Polly in her skimpy outfit she wears in the movie. To everybody else, I still recommend in picking this one up, a very decent kung fu movie which I'm sure most of you would enjoy.

**Fighting Ace (Taiwan, 1979: Cheung Ching-Chiu) – aka Kung Fu Face; Master of Death; Kid's Ace in the Hole** - So here's another in a long line of kung fu comedies that came out in response to the success of Jackie Chan's Seasonal Films (*Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*), this time starring superkicker John Liu (*Secret Rivals* and *Kung Fu Emanuelle*). Unlike a lot of other kung fu comedies, John plays his role completely straight, leaving the comedy to some of his supporting cast, which is good, as I can't imagine the guy acting goofy.

Anyways, we open with two guys fighting. The Bad Guy is fighting another martial artist, who is supposedly in possession of a manual written by the great San Te (Gordon Liu's character from *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*). The Bad Guy finally gets his hand on the manual, but not before killing the man and raping (and killing) his wife. Luckily, the Housekeeper and the dead couple's son are able to hide from the guy and finally escape.

Some twenty years later or so, the son has grown up into John Liu, who wanders around with his "uncle" looking for kung fu masters to teach him, so that he may get revenge one day. One day he spots a kung fu master (Kwang Yung Moon, *The Loot* and *Ninja in the Dragon's Den*) entering the household of a rich guy, whom the latter wants to teach his fat, lazy son. John and his uncle are able to get jobs as servants at the household, in hopes of John being able to study kung fu under the master. Luckily, the rich man's son is such a fat loser that the kung fu master, Master Yen, is more than willing to take John as a student. Master Yen teaches John to be more of a super kicker than he already is until the rich guy finds out and John is forced to leave.

So John, his uncle, and another servant leave the household and start selling candy on the street. John eventually finds two more kung fu masters, one a palm technique stylist and the other a drunken beggar type (which was required by HK cinematic law in those days) and starts studying under both of them.

This goes well until one day when Master Yen's daughter (Doris Lung Jun-Erh, *Master of the Flying Guillotine*) is attacked by some would-be rapists and John comes to her rescue. The ruffians turn out to be lackeys of the Bad Guy from the beginning, who recruits John to be his student (even though John doesn't know it yet). Eventually, John must confront the guy to protect his friends and family and avenge his parents' murders.

Yeah, there's nothing new here. There's a fair bit of training and quite of bit of fighting here. There's some humor, although it never gets as irritating as it does in a lot of other kung fu comedies from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most of the humor comes from the servant character who accompanies John after he leaves the manor, and consists of the guy acting like he's hurt so that John can leave one master and go to the other master's place to study.

The fight sequences are choreographed by Ricky Cheng (star of Chang Cheh's *Chinese Super Ninjas*) and Wong Chi Sang (action director for the cult favorite *Mystery of Chess Boxing*). All of the fights are pretty solid, mixing John Liu's flexible kicking with some acrobatics and Southern hand-based fighting, including some Panther style from the villain.

John Liu, who was rarely more than his kicking, does some good handwork in this one. However, he's practically shown up by fellow superkicker Kwan Yung Moon (aka "The Mad Korean"), who does some great kicking in the first act. Although the fights often look more like John Liu saying, "Hey, look what I can do with my legs!", there's no denying the man's skill. Interestingly enough, John was actually a more consistent fighter on film than his teacher, superkicker Dorian "Flashlegs" Tan Tao Liang.

Worth it for the fight scenes, but everything else is rather bland.

**Fighting Fists of Shanghai Joe (Italy, 1972: Mario Caiano) - aka My Name is Shanghai Joe** - Although it seems a bit curious at first, the blending of the traditional Shaw Brothers style kungfu film with the American western seems obvious. After all, the Chinese played a major part in the history of the American West, and Americans love kungfu and cowboys.

Unfortunately, the melding of similar genres was never given much of a chance. The television show Kungfu pretty much obliterated the genre right out of the starting gate, as fans were forced to watch David Carradine walk in slow



motion across the desert, occasionally stopping to slap a cowboy and speak in that cheesy mystical Chinese tone no real Chinese people use, including monks.

In Italy, where they make the best films about the American west, they opted for the less mystical, more violent approach, which resulted in films that were much more enjoyable to watch and much more in line with the feel of a kungfu film. After all, would you rather hear David Carradine paraphrase Confucius or watch David Chiang punch someone's head off?

Fighting Fists of Shanghai Joe is the most successful kungfu western I've seen so far. It's really quite a good film. A young kungfu hero arrives in San Francisco, but soon sets out to Texas to make a name for himself as a cowboy. He doesn't want to wash dishes, work as a servant, or do laundry.

Of course, the Old West is full of grumbling racists in long johns, so it's up to Shanghai Joe to kick their asses, which he does frequently. Eventually he gets quite a reputation as a bad-ass.

When Joe foils the plot of a rich land baron who smuggles in Mexican slaves and treats them ruthlessly, the land owner hires four of the best guns in the West to kill Joe, who also hooks up with a beautiful Mexican woman, making this one of the few international films where an Asian male gets a little action from a non-Asian woman.

But when the decision has to be made between lovin' and blood-spurting violence, the film opts for the red stuff, and Shanghai Joe delivers it in abundance as he kungfu's the shit out of evil-doers across Texas. Whether he's scalping the guy who likes to scalp people, boiling the face of Pedro the Cannibal, throwing people on spikes, or pulling their eyes out, Joe offers up no mercy in his quest to liberate the migrant workers and put right what is wrong. He's no Kwai Chang Caine preaching peace and love. Shanghai Joe says, "Fuck your hippie shit! I'm pulling your eyes out, mother fucker!" And then he jumps across the room and does it, and you will thank him for it!

The land baron eventually brings in the one man who can match Joe--another kungfu expert who studied at the same temple. This guy looks Japanese, probably because of his Japanese clothes and hairstyle. So the final duel is between fists, as it should be in a kungfu film.

Decent acting and choreography, a good script, ample attacks on racism and exploitation, and plenty of chest-smashing kungfu gore make this a top-notch way to kill some time. Good soundtrack, too. This film does right all the things that were fucked up in Once Upon a Time in China and America and made that film such an embarrassment. It's a shame they didn't study films like Shanghai Joe closer. They may have been half as good as this is.

Oh yeah--rampant use of the phrase "Chinaman," but "He ain't human!" is kept to a minimum. Joe spouts no ancient Eastern wisdom, but he does know acupuncture.

**Fighting Fool, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Patrick Yuen)** - Unless you were a filmmaker like Lau Kar-Leung, Shaw Brothers never really countered the increasing popularity of the kung-fu comedy made independently at Seasonal and starring Jackie Chan. There's desperation in The Fighting Fool as well and no breakthrough in any performer in sight but having said that, some fun and complex action makes the trek worthwhile. Meng (Meng Yuen-Man) and Zhu Tou Bing (Chun Wong) team up to find the former's master and to retrieve a retractable pole weapon before the evil bastards at Eagle Mansion do. Featuring your basic plot with forced comedy but the product does move quite fast, an actual pee testing scene as ordered by the Indian played by Jamie Luk is very funny (especially the pay off) and you got to snicker at the fact that our character's names are translated as Stupid and Pig Head. Hsu Hsia's action along the way is usually fast and fluent and a benefit for the production. Especially for those who won't respond to the comedy. Co-written by Wong Jing.

**Fighting Of Shaolin Monk (Taiwan, 1977: Li Fu-Ti) - A/K/A Killer Priest, Kung Fu Exorcist** - Kung Fu meets the super natural in this crazy piece of old school Hong Kong cinema. A shady looking Taoist priest turns up at a village ridden by drought. The local doctor and his son suspect he's hatching some bad scheme. A traveling Buddhist monk played by veteran Hong Kong actor Chan Sing turns up and makes things difficult for the Priest and becomes the doctors son's master. That's the basic loose plot that's made harder to follow by the fact the film appears to be edited for its international release.

Many of the action scenes look cut along with many non-violent dialogue scenes. It appears some scene's are also in the wrong order. Having not watched the original HK version I can't say what's been edited out?.

There are few obvious jump cuts and plot holes though. In one scene the hero's girlfriend is kidnapped by the evil Taoist monk. Next thing she's free and taking part in the hero's kung fu training. In another scene Chan Sing is listening to a conversation taking place behind a closed door. Then it cuts abruptly to the door being open and he's

suddenly in mid conversation with a person. Some of the action scenes start or end abruptly giving the impression they've been trimmed down too. The run time is 1-hour 22-minutes so I'd take a guess and say around 8-minutes has been edited out. Most of these films have the average run time of 1-hour 30-minutes. Many releases got altered for the international market and this film appears to be a casualty of this.

The version I watched comes from the Hollywood East label. It's basically a bootleg release presented in widescreen with a grainy and sometimes faded looking print. Still it was enjoyable and worth watching if you're a fan of Chan Sing. His performance as the monk Tamo is what made this film worth viewing. I'd love to see the original cut with restored picture and sound.

**Filthy Guy (Taiwan, 1978: King Weng) – aka Return of the Secret Rivals** - Taiwanese oddity starring Sammo Hung as a guy with killer dandruff...or something seriously wrong with his head at any rate, since it's dirty and super strong. I have to admit I laughed quite a lot during this, though that might be more because of the Monty Pythonish dubbing. Poor Carter Wong looks rather embarrassed as the villain, frequently glaring past the camera at his agent, judging from the expression on his face. Dean Shek is pock-marked and painfully crosseyed, TWO hot girls are mistaken for men, and you get the pleasure of a topless Wei Ping-ao. It's filthy alright...

**Fingers That Kill (Hong Kong, 1972: Hui Gwok, Xu Zi-Bin, Hsu Ko)** - *Fingers That Kill* is a pretty standard basher with Tony Liu Jun-Guk in a very rare lead hero role. The story is about a group of gangsters that come to town and promise the poor men of the town work in Thailand. Only thing is none of the men can read and are basically sold into slavery when they sign the contracts. Then after a year or so the gangsters come back to the town and tell family members that their relative has incurred a debt and they take any good looking girls as payment and put them in the brothel.

At some point Tony Liu returns from 3 years training in kung fu in the mountains (with Jason Pai Piao as his older brother) and finds that every one in his family is either sold off or dead as well as his fiancé. At first he loses it, but then realizes the best way to get revenge is by going to work for the thugs. Along with his hot-headed friend, they travel to Thailand and go to work cutting trees. Tony pretends to not know any kung fu, but his friend snaps at every injustice. When he sees Tony bowing and saying he's sorry to the thugs he turns his back on him, not realizing his plan to stay undercover until he can get his chance for revenge.

The action choreography is a bit stilted and there are a lot of pauses before punches are thrown, but if you enjoy bashers from this era like I do, you will most likely enjoy this.

**Fist of Dragon (Taiwan, 1977: Kim Hyeong-Jun)** - In terms of acting and choreography, this is one of the very worst kung-fu films I have ever seen. That doesn't stop it from being incredibly entertaining, for all the wrong reasons.

Ling Chia, aka Judy Lee spends most of the film dressed as a man, calling herself Peter. In the English dub it is never explained why. She and her partner (I can't figure out the actress' name) are asked by an interpol agent to infiltrate and bust up a smuggling ring. Judy Lee's partner impersonates a boss from Chinatown USA, known as Big Sister, aka Kitty. Lo Lieh plays the boss of the smuggling ring and Bruce Cheung Mong the boss above him. The gang is never shown smuggling, but they rob a nightclub and it's denizens (on the advice of the false Big Sister) but then are thwarted by Judy Lee and her partner (also wearing costumes) in a hilarious scene of costumed kung fu.

If you like kung fu movies and bad movies, this one is worth seeking out.

**Fist of Fury 2 (Taiwan, 1977: Lee Tso-Nam)** - aka **Chinese Connection 2** - *Fist of Fury 2*, another attempt to make a sequel to the Bruce Lee hit, makes for a fascinating example of divergent evolution next to the early Jackie Chan effort. Both films seek to tell the story of the Ching Wu School following the death of Chen Zhen, albeit from the points of view of different characters. In this case, we see what happens to the school's teacher, played once again by Tien Feng, in the aftermath of the massacres of both the Japanese and Ching Wu schools that marked the last act of *Fist of Fury*. Interestingly enough, if not for a key moment in the film's opening scene, this film could actually pass for a prequel to *New Fist of Fury* as well as a sequel to *The Chinese Connection*.

We open with the funeral procession of Chen Zhen, performed by the remaining students from the school. As the pallbearers are burying the casket, Ma Li'er (not played by Nora Miao, but by some actress whose face is obscured by the traditional Chinese funeral garb) throws her onto the coffin and commits suicide. This troubles an already-shaken Teacher, who soon finds himself turning to alcohol to deal with his problems, which are only just beginning.

Shortly after the funeral, some Japanese martial artists led by another interpreter, Mr. Wong (Chan Wai-Lau, filling in for Wei Ping-Ao), enter the Ching Wu school. They announce that their leader, Mr. Miyamoto (Lo Lieh, who had played the lead Japanese baddie in *The Chinese Boxer*), has acquired the school and now requires the students to vacate the premises. The students don't take that very well and try to fight back, only to get whooped by the superior Japanese fighters. The Chinese students flee and try to hide out at the other local schools, but are hunted down by the Japanese and subsequently tortured.

A few weeks later, one of the remaining Ching Wu students sneaks by the grave of Chen Zhen, which has been cordoned off by the Japanese. He finds a stranger who claims to be Chen Zhen's brother, Chen Shan (Bruce Li). The student warns Chen Shan to beat it, but too late, some Japanese karate fighters show up. Rather than leave, Chen Shan wipes the floor with the lot and forces them to pay respect to his dead brother. Mr. Miyamoto is *really* going to love that, isn't he?

Miyamoto starts pressuring the local police inspector to arrest Chen Shan, although the inspector sympathizes with Chen enough to let him off the hook. The Japanese school reacts by using violence to coerce the other schools into turning Chen Shan in, which quickly puts the schools at odds with what little remains of Ching Wu, now that the Teacher is a useless drunk. Of course, it will only take but a few patriotic speeches to get the schools on Chen's side, guaranteeing Miyamoto's ire. Miyamoto declares the extermination of all schools in Shanghai, which his men handily carry out, even though two of the masters survive and go into hiding.

Obviously, the masters won't be able to hide for very long, leaving it up to Chen to protect them. Moreover, the inspector can only stick up for Chen for so long until he puts him and his men in jeopardy. So Chen will eventually have to go on the offensive if he wants to save the kung fu students of Shanghai and his own tail.

Despite being a reworking of the film it's supposed to be a sequel for, *Fist of Fury 2* succeeds on the strength of its action and its rather bleak storyline. Like *New Fist of Fury*, the filmmakers try to continue the story of the Ching Wu school in a logical (well, at least according to the logic of kung fu movies) way, but here the villains are far more cruel and dastardly than Chen Sing and his daughter were in the other movie. The entire first act is devoted solely to showing people suffer—heck, Bruce Li doesn't even show up until the 30-minute mark. Even after Chen Shan quickly establishes his fighting credentials, a *lot* of people are going to be unfairly walloped and snuffed before the curtain falls.

The movie also benefits from Tommy Lee's action direction, which is a lot better than what we got in too many other Bruce Li films. Tommy Lee had offered his talents to the groundbreaking hit *The Secret Rivals* the year before and was already on his way to becoming one of Taiwan's most talented fight choreographers of that era. He wisely avoids trying to fit Bruce Li completely into the Bruce Lee mold, giving him a similar, but distinctive style instead. Li (or Ho Chung Tao, if you will) kicks a lot better here than he has done in other films and his handwork is sufficiently complex to set itself apart from Bruce's simpler punches. The main flaw to the action is that the group melees tends to be repetitive and uninteresting whenever Ho Chung Tao isn't dishing out the hurt.

The storyline isn't exactly original, and the movie loses a few points for its treatment of the Ma Li'er character. Watching her mature in *New Fist of Fury* was a refreshing piece of character development, so her suicide in this film's first reel feels almost sexist and backward in comparison. Interestingly enough, after the funeral sequence, there are no women in the movie whatsoever (save a few extras, probably). Compare that with the Jackie Chan film, which had two strong female characters on both sides.

Criticisms aside, this is rightly considered to be one of the better Bruce Li vehicles out there. Interestingly enough, Li spent a good portion of his career as not only a Bruce Lee imitator, but on making movies that involved the Little Dragon himself somehow. *Bruce Lee, a Dragon Story*; *Young Bruce Lee* and *Bruce Lee, the Man, the Myth* were pseudo-biographical films about Bruce Lee. *Bruce Lee's Deadly Kung Fu* tells a fictional account of how jeet kune do was founded, even though Li didn't technically play Lee in the film. *Exit the Tiger, Enter the Dragon*; *New Game of Death*; and *Bruce Lee, We Miss You* were set in alternate universes following Bruce Lee's death. *Dynamo* is essentially a Bruceploitation film about a man who becomes a Bruceploitation actor, if you can wrap your head around that.

Moreso than Bruce Le and Dragon Lee, Bruce Li's films were, for better or worse, intimately related to the great star himself. Both men had similar martial arts training, especially in the *wing chun* style (I'm going to guess that Ho Chung Tao also trained a bit in *tai kwon do*). I suppose then that it's only fitting that Bruce Li/Ho Chung Tao be cast in a sequel to Bruce Lee's most revered film. And it should be fitting that it beats out all of the other attempts to make a sequel to *Fist of Fury*, including Donnie Yen's recent *Legend of the Fist: Return of Chen Zhen*.

Unfortunately, Bruce Li would not be as successful in...

**Fist of Fury III (Taiwan, 1979: To Man-Bo) - aka Chinese Connection 3; Jeet Kune Do the Claws and the Supreme Kung Fu; O Tigre em Fúria** - I'd like to think that *Fist of Fury III* was the victim (at least in part) of its 1979 release date. The kung fu movie landscape had changed a lot since 1977, especially because of Jackie Chan. The success of *The Drunken Master* meant that studios—both mainstream and independent—would try to cash in on that film's success, cranking out kung fu comedy one after the other for low costs and potentially-high profits. Racist portraits of the Japanese still existed, but had become moot the year before with Lau Kar-Leung's balanced take on the Chinese/Japanese conflict in *Heroes of the East*. With Jackie Chan becoming the big thing, Brucesploitation on the whole was quickly turning into an anachronism.

The post-*Drunken Master* mentality shows up here in the form of a bungling brother to Chen Shan (and, by extension, Bruce Lee's Chen Zhen), played by the usually-reliable Hon Gwok-Choi (*Call Me Dragon* and *Running on Karma*). It ends up cheapening what is already an underwhelming film and dealing a blow to the original film's power that even the lackluster *New Fist of Fury* wasn't guilty of. Alas, that is but one of the film's many sins.

We open with a brief fight between Chen Shan, who's returning to his home in Macao following the events of the last film, and some Japanese baddies led by the local interpreter for the Japanese (Wei Ping-Ao, essentially reprising his role as Wu from *Fist of Fury*). After whooping them, Chen comes home and promises his blind mother (Wang Lai, who made some 200+ films in her career, including gems like *Hong Kong Emanuelle*), that he'll never fight again. That's a bit drastic, considering his speeches about sticking up for yourself in the previous entry. His worthless brother is on hand to get into trouble, which will eventually come back to bite the family in the arse.

Chen Shan goes to visit his uncle, the owner of the local hung gar school. I'm guessing that "uncle" is only a friendly term, since uncle's daughter (Choi King-Fai) has decided to spurn her engagement to the school's top student (Bruce Tong of *Shaolin Temple*) in order to flirt with Chen Shan. When the local Japanese school resolves to open a casino in town, their leader (*Broken Oath's* Fong Yau) declares that Chen Shan needs to be wiped out in order to avenge the death of Miyamoto, villain from the first film. Unfortunately, their political clout in Macao is less than it is in Shanghai, so they'll have to operate a little less openly. The Interpreter suggests that they use the love triangle to pit the Top Student against Chen Shan.

This leads into a bizarre tangent where Chen Shan catches Top Student fighting with a father-daughter pair of traveling martial artists (the daughter is played by Michelle Yim, of *Passage of the Dragon*). Chen Shan bests him in a duel, which pisses Top Student off even more. Chen Shan takes the dad n' daughter home, where his mother nurses the ailing father back to health. Meanwhile, an increasingly distraught Top Student finds himself turning to alcohol to deal with the fact that his fiancée doesn't care for him anymore. One evening, Interpreter shows up and spikes the guy's wine with some aphrodisiac, which causes him to almost rape his master's daughter. Obviously, this gets the guy kicked out of the school.

A reel from the version I watched went missing at this point, so I'm not entirely sure what happens. I'm guessing that Top Student kills his master and frames Chen Shan for it, who is thrown in jail. I'm also guessing that the real identities of the father-daughter pair are revealed, since it was hinted at before that they were in Macao to resolve some special business. Anyway, the master's daughter commits suicide while Top Student is having another random fight with father-daughter pair. The next day, Worthless Brother tries to pick a fight with the Interpreter, leading to his getting beaten to death by the Japanese. Chen Shan's mother subsequently dies of grief. Chen Shan is let out of jail almost effortlessly by father-daughter pair and as soon as he finds his dead family, he's going to want to get revenge.

The script here is just a mess, from the inconsistent characterizations to a main villain (Shaw Brothers veteran Ku Feng) who doesn't even show up onscreen (at least in the version I saw) until the final fight itself. That in itself makes the bad guys even less compelling than Chen Sing and his daughter in *New Fist of Fury*. Moreover, the *Fist of Fury* franchise is a patriotic (if slightly racist) one. It's about one man standing up for his people in the face of tyranny and foreign imperialism. In this movie, however, the villains here do very little oppressing and their plan to get revenge on Chen Shan via a love triangle is rather silly and petty, rather than the sort of thing to get audiences riled up. I also didn't appreciate how the father-daughter duo disappear from the movie after freeing Chen Shan from prison, despite the fact that their kung fu is actually pretty good.

It doesn't help that the fight scenes are choreographed by 3<sup>rd</sup> string choreographers Wong Mei (*Bruce's Deadly Fingers* and *Bruce Li in New Guinea*) and Addy Sung (*Bruce Lee's Greatest Revenge*). *Fist of Fury 2* didn't represent Tommy Lee's best work, but it was obvious he was trying for more than your garden-variety Bruce Lee imitation, which worked a lot in the movie's favor. Unfortunately, Wong and Addy had histories far too steeped in the Brucesploitation genre to break out of type, and Ho Chung Tao ends up back in the garden with some uninspired Bruce Lee-esque posturing and whooping. The action is made even worse by the liberal undercranking applied to a number of the one-vs-many fights.

Things get even worse once we reach the finale, since the filmmakers liberally rip off *Fist of Fury II*, from the villain killing his interpreter right down to the final shot of the villain committing seppuku. A lot of the characters' moves feel borrowed from the Bruce Li/Lo Lieh fight from the last film and the only moment of fighting freshness comes when Bruce Tong shows up to briefly tango with Ku Feng. Nothing about the fight is all that original or interesting, ending an already uninspired movie on a bland note.

**Fist that Kills, The (Taiwan, 1973: Wong Tin-Lam) – aka Ninja Fist of Fire** - A young prince is captured by a big villain and his allies. The villains' chief tries to frame a good man who tries to save the prince in order to marry his daughter, but he couldn't know that Cheung Ching Ching and Chiang Ming were going to help the old man to save the prince. A superb movie, with great fights. Chiang Ming is very good and the great Cheung Ching Ching is excellent, as usual. What a "kung fu girl"!!! If you're a Cheung Ching Ching's fan, don't miss this movie, it's great!!!

**Fist To Fist (Hong Kong, 1973: Jimmy L. Pascual, John Woo) - aka Fists of the Double K** - Although listed as assistant director, John Woo directed all or a significant part of this basher two years before his actual debut *The Young Dragons*. Even a story strand about a blind girl appears here and it's perhaps no coincidence it's an integral part of John's 1989 heroic bloodshed classic *The Killer* too. *Fist To Fist* (aka *Fists Of The Double K*) is not working with scope, tons of extras or even complex story as police officer played by Henry Yu (also lead of Woo's debut) heads to an abandoned town run by bandits to take revenge. Which is fine as a frame work if you paint your genre well with the element expected out of you. *Fist To Fist* delivers exceptionally well in the second half in particular (first is quite an uneventful trek) as concepts of an opponent with a knife in his ponytail and Yu with a sharp boomerang slicing his foes are executed with admirable intensity and skill. But being a basher, the Yuen Woo-Ping and Yuen Cheung-Yan choreographed action gets time to shine in several extended, intricate and primal fight sequences. Simon Yuen and Fong Yau also appears and further members of the Yuen family can be spotted in the roles of 'thugs'.

**Fistful of Talons (Hong Kong, 1983: Sun Chung)** - This movie was a blast. The plot is very straight forward, but the action is fantastic, and there is some effective comedy throughout as well. The tone reminds me of *Deadly Breaking Sword*, in that it was very dark with bits of comedy mixed in.. (I suppose many Sun Chung flicks feel this way to me though.) Billy Chong is just excellent here. The best way for me to describe him and his performance here is by comparing him to another actor...Yuen Biao. I don't think I need to say much more. He can do it all, and shows it here excellently. He also shows a knack for comedy throughout as well. One scene where he is talking to someone and tosses a piece of trash behind him hitting another guy in the face had me cracking up, although it was simple. While the plot was thin, the fantastic fighting, and solid acting throughout made it a great easy watch.

The rest of the fighting cast does a good job as well, but mostly serve to be Billy Chongs punching bags. I was hoping to see a sick match up between Billy and Chang Shan, but it wasn't meant to be, as Chang didn't get much to do here. Whang In-Shik was of course great in the little time he had, mainly at the end. While the finale was awesome, it really wasn't my favorite scene or fight of the movie.. The fights earlier in the movie gave Billy Chong more of a chance to strut his stuff, and Sun Chung was doing great work with the camera.. I am not very knowledgeable when it comes to film, but the camera work during the action in this film really stood out to me. Sun Chung uses many angles and dynamic moving camera shots to follow the action, and it is coupled with very fluent and athletic choreography and performances from the actors to great effect. Actually, one of my favorite scenes was very early in the movie. Where I'll assume Billy Chong was doubling for Pai Ying, and just beats the hell out of a few guys, as he tosses his sword under his leg, catches it, etc.. Was very neat and impressive stuff, from whoever was doubling Pai Ying..

As in most Sun Chung movies, the atmosphere is very dark due to the sets and music used. Most of the soundtrack was just atmospheric background music, but there was one track that played a couple times that I loved. Does anyone know what this one was? It was during a scene where Billy Chong was riding a horse through a field and another when he was training. It sounded familiar to me.

**Fists and Guts (Hong Kong, 1983: Lau Kar-Wing)** - Kung-fu comedy from the Lau family (Directed by L.K.Leung, starring Gordon and L.K.Wing) along with who seem to be Lau family favorite's in Lee Hoi San and Lo Lieh. Gordon Liu plays a guy who is on the hunt for a stolen treasure, he bribes two goofy con-men (L.K.Wing and Lee Hoi San) to help him track down the thief and retrieve it. There isn't much action in this movie. There are only a handful of fight

scenes, but the few fight scenes were quality as expected from this crew. I found myself laughing often and enjoying the comedy aspects of the movie.. For the most part, the laughs were intentional. Lau Kar Wing and Lee Hoi San in particular had me cracking up. There was a pretty strange scene with some kind of kung fu leper cult, but I found some humor in that too.

The few fights were pretty damn good, while maybe not the best given the cast involved. Lee Hoi San and Lau Kar Wing were wasted unfortunately, they didn't get many chances to fight. (Maybe literally one in the whole movie.). Gordon Liu has a couple great fights though, one where he is using two daggers against a guy with a staff; another where he and his opponent are trying to be silent while fighting. The finale was a fantastic, energetic fight between the reliable screen fighting duo of Lo Lieh and Gordon Liu.. When these two throw down under LKL's direction, it always seems to bring the best out of them.

Overall, the film isn't great, it could have used more action, and the story was nothing special. Wasting the screen fighting ability of one top tier screen fighter and one very good screen fighter was also disappointing. There is a twist that seem's kind of cool and decent on the surface, but really it just comes out of no where.. With that said, I wasn't bored at any point and found the humor to work for the most part. The little bit of action there was seemed to be at a high level to me, particularly the end fight. Yeah it may not have been Gordon Liu/LKL's best, but it's hard for this team to disappoint when it comes to the squabbles!

Above-average, entertaining movie from a crew capable of far greater work. Worth a watch, just don't go in expecting a ton of action.

**Fists, Kicks and Evil (Hong Kong, 1979: Do Liu Boh)** - Despite an extremely generic storyline 'Fists, Kicks and Evil' compensates with some great kung fu action that showcases the talents of Bruce Liang and features worthwhile performances from Bolo and Phillip Ko.

When Bruce Liang's father is killed by Manchu's who have overrun the town and taken control of the local kung fu school Bruce is rescued by an old master who teaches him crane fist kung fu so he can come back and beat up the villains in the final reel. It's the classic kung fu movie plot in a nutshell but interwoven with lots of great action.

For a start there's Bruce Liang's excellent kicking techniques but here, as in 'Ruthless Revenge', he shows he can do much more than that with some inventive, intricate and fast fight sequences. Despite a small budget (the film is mainly staged in outdoor settings), time has obviously been taken to get the action scenes right.

Being quite new to Bruce Liang, I'd always assumed that he was another Bruce Lee clone (and in the early days he was marketed as such) but here he shows he can pull shapes with the best of them. This isn't a one man show though and able support comes from Bolo Yeung and Phillip Ko. Great shape pulling all round.

**Fists Of Bruce Lee (Taiwan, 1979: Ho Chung-Tao) – aka Secret Agent Sang Yong** - Starring and directed by Ho Chung-Tao (otherwise known as Bruce Li), here's yet another poor Bruceploitation that completely misunderstood that by avoiding the obvious Bruce Lee references you automatically was a clever filmmaker. Case in point, Ho directs a dull cops and gangsters story, with himself playing a cocky agent infiltrating one gang while others are out to do something else too. Yes, I stopped caring early and when we don't get any relentless, shameless, attempts at echoing the Little Dragon's legacy, the film stands on its own and feels completely embarrassed. And it should, despite one good fight scene at a playground, the theme from Live And Let Die and the actual James Bond-theme rearing its head as well as a Bond-esque villain weaponry turning up in Lo Lieh's hands. Or rather, his hand is suddenly on a chain while squaring off with Li. Extremely minor tangents of fun, otherwise Fists Of Bruce Lee is a torture consisting of poor dubbing galore that has no chance reaching the all important area (and the only area where these efforts could compete) of fun.

**Five Deadly Venoms, The (Hong Kong, 1978: Chang Cheh)** - Yang De is a 3 yr. student whose master is the head of the House of 5 Venoms. His master is dying and has 5 senior students schooled in different venom styles:

Centipede --- Zhang Yiaotian (aka 1000 Hands)  
Snake --- Qi Dong (aka Snake Spirit Dude)  
Scorpion --- Gao Ji  
Gecko --- Meng Tianxia

Toad --- Liang Shan

Each venom represents a certain skill and ability.

Yang De is to seek out these 5 seniors, many of which are unaware of the others. The 5 Venoms House has a bad reputation. If one of the students is conducting himself with good behavior, he is to be let alone. If one is not, Yang De is to kill him. The master has a classmate who knows the location of the treasures of the House and he fears that his 5 senior students are searching for these treasures. That pretty much entails the premise of the film.

There is a cool display of the 5 Venoms showing their skills at the beginning of the film as the master describes them to Yang De. Later on there is a really good fight between the Centipede/Toad Venoms. Following that is the introduction of a cool torture device called "The Coat of 1000 Needles" (a cross between an 'iron maiden' and the world's worst acupuncture treatment). This leads to a fight between the Toad/Snake Venoms. Then another torture device is brought out called "The Red Stomacher" (but it's applied to the back though I guess it works either way). The final fight runs 10 mins. and pits Yang De and the Gecko Venom against the Snake and Centipede Venoms. The Scorpion Venom shows up, too, and battles everyone.

I have never seen a Venoms movie before and I'm probably not going to make any friends saying this but I thought it was.....meh. I mean.....the quality of the fights were truly great. Seriously. But the quantity and length of the fights was, I thought, lacking. I thought there would be more. Seriously.

**Five Element Ninjas (Hong Kong, 1982: Chang Cheh)** - What's that saying, Don't look a gift horse in the mouth? This is pretty apt as Chief Hong pits his martial clan against the superior fighting skill of Master Yuan's Martial Alliance. Hong loses yet again, even with the trump card of a Japanese samurai up his sleeve.

Before the samurai commits seppuku, he sneakily injures Master Yuan, telling Chief Hong to send word to the King of the Ninjas, Kembuchi Mudou (Chan Wai Man.) Soon after, Yuan's Alliance receive the Five Elements formation challenge from Mudou. After decimating the Alliance save for Chieng Tien-Chi's Hao, Kembuchi and his sneaky brethren ambush their hosts. By the magic wand of Ni Kuang / Chang Cheh illogic, Hao meanwhile remembers he had ninja training from a previous master and goes in search of. Ultimately, Hao and a trio of equally skilled Chinese martial artists issue a challenge against Kembuchi and Five element formation, culminating in one of the craziest, most fun end fights I've seen yet.

This is a stupidly fun China vs. Japan film and it knows it. The super heroics and villainy on display here are a hoot (look at all those muscles and capes the Alliance team sport - love ya Lo Mang!) Everyone is in on how over the top this is and some actors play their demises as delightfully camp as possible. Yeah, if you step on your own guts in the midst of a fight, you'd be dead too.

The Japanese rely on speed and stealth, their deployment of ninja techniques are very much by the scroll. Not so for our lithe Chinese acrobats who make ninjutsu far more colorful with their flips, tumbles and weapon twirling hoodoo. Chinese weapons are out in the open, they are graceful and elegant much like their bearers. The Japanese weapons can be easily concealed, are blunt, sharp and painful. Anything that can kill quickly and savagely. It's fun to see ninja weapons such as shackles, shruiken and hand / foot claws used here. To add even more comic book flavor, the subtitles kindly let us know each of these weapons as they are introduced.

Chieng Tien-Chi, Chu Ko, Wong Li and Yu Tai-Ping are an absolute delight throwing the ninja techniques back at their adversaries with so much more Peking panache and verve. Every time Chu Ko does a spontaneous flip or split, I want to cry... so amazing. Ahem, It is not surprising to see Chang Cheh's beloved Peking Opera flag fu cleverly deployed during the second Fire element fight and it's my favorite use of that outside of *Life Gamble*. That flag fu is a nice visual of the C vs. J business here. Flowing, acrobatic Chinese wushu used to eradicate stealthy Japanese ninjutsu.

Suffice to say, Cheng Tien-Chi and Chu Ko should pat themselves on the back for some of the most complex and crazy acrobatic choreography put on film. They give Chan Wai Man some spectacular room to literally kick, um, chests. Cheng and Chu clearly played up Chan's strengths as a kick boxer (love those foot claws!) and cleverly worked in the use of knives along with the Japanese Kwan Do, the Naganata. This is the most complex period fighting I've seen CWM perform and he really shines. Outside of his one minute cameo in *All Men Are Brothers*, and some flag pike stuff in *Judgment of An Assassin*, I hadn't seen Chan use a pole weapon as he does here (the halberd use in *The Deadly Breaking Sword* as great as that is, scratches the surface of what Chan delivers in this film.) It's

great to watch him use the naginata in tandem with his blade and kicking skills in an insane display of stamina and viciousness. The end fight of the four heroes against Kembuchi is one of my most favorite fights in kung fu cinema.

It doesn't take much to make you boo hiss the Nippon characters here - Chang pushes the ultra heroism of the Chinese Alliance into full-on white hat territory. To note, Lo Meng performs brilliantly through the single most noble, heroic death of his Shaw Brothers career. *Five Elements Ninjas* is bloody, loud, silly and all kinds of awesome fun. If you need a break from serious China vs. Japan, look no further.

**Five Fighters from Shaolin (Taiwan, 1984: Ko Pao) – aka Ninja Hunter 2; Possession of Ghost** - The movie opens with Jack Long as some sort of cultist doing some crazy voodoo shit with some chicken blood and candles. Then it flashes to some ninja guys infiltrating a Monastery attempting to steal some books, who are pummeled and clowned by a loony senior monk (Mark Long). The monk leaves the monastery and after a few fights/encounters in various locations gathers...FIVE DISCIPLES (Yau Ming Yin, Chen Shan, Chiang Sheng, William Yen, and Ching Kuo Chung, who each naturally took part in said encounters before becoming disciples.) Oh yeah, somewhere along the way he also picked some broad up that tags along as well, but she is just a bad plot device. Anyway, Looney senior Monk trains them all in a different style, each with their own training scene(s). Eventually they set out to learn who/why someone attempted to steal the books, and our obligatory final showdown takes place.

So, for an indie from Taiwan, the plot was actually pretty damn good.. It actually didn't seem like just filler in between a bunch of fight scenes (as many classic indies do). No it wasn't great and there wasn't a surprise twist ending, but it carries itself well in between the action. There is even some development between the disciples as they grow from strangers to brothers. The comedy was also decent(intentional and some unintentional), I found myself snickering instead of rolling my eyes at most of it. Again, all things considered, that's impressive. Mark Long, William Yen, and Chiang Sheng were particularly humorous.

Now for the best part of the film..of course, the fights. The fights were high in quantity and quality, and no one really disappointed me. Clearly some of the cast are better than others, but its to be expected. (William Yen, and Ma Cheung are only going to look so good next to the Longs, Chen Shan, and Chieng Shang...). Alan Hsu and Wong Chi Sang were among the baddies. With this cast, you get what you expect, some absolutely fantastic shapes. Chiang Shang gets to shows off his weapon skills too. They do a good job at implementing each disciples training into the finale. I really can't say anyone stole the show here, the action was solid all around. Jack Longs character is a straight badass, and the movie takes a turn towards zany "Taoism Drunkard" and "Shaolin Prince" style antics when he shows up.. He is seemingly invincible, has a wicked mustache and eyebrows, and blows things up. Hell yes.

The few "cons" to the movie (in my mind) had to do with the plot, and they were minor, so I'll avoid spoilers? Not that there is a whole hell of a lot to figure out, lol. Overall it has an above average plot for what it is with top class fighting and cast. There is some zany stuff and comedy which may put some people off, but I felt that it worked in the movies favor.. I may consider this among my favorite classic indies...

**Five Pattern Dragon Claws (South Korea, 1983: Kim Si-Hyeon) - a.k.a Five Pattern Dragon Claw, Fist Of Lightening, Thunder Fist** - Kam Fu(Hwang Jang Lee) and his gang of fighters, want to rule the Martial World. Their first target, is the local Buddhist temple, its followers and their secret Kung Fu manuals. Only a small group of resilient students led by Wong(Dragon Lee) stand in their way. Can Kam and his ThunderFoot technique win?, or will Wong and his lethal Lightening Mantis Strike stop him for good?.

*"I will teach you a Kung Fu punch, using your fist"*

High kicking Korean action from the Filmark movie company, filmed entirely in South Korea and directed by Kim Si-Hyeon(The Dragons Infernal Showdown). Dragon Lee is his usual pumped up, highly strung self, showing no fear off his enemies. Kim Si-Hyeon must have directed more Dragon Lee movies than anyone else?. Starting with Dragon Lee VS Five Brothers(1978) and finishing with very movie I'm reviewing. Kim would retire after making one more movie, Killing In The Nude(1985), which sounds like a slasher movie set in a nudist park. Godfrey Ho who picked up the movie for its international release, does his usual cheeky trick of putting his name down as director.

Hwang Jang Lee is on top form here, with yet another jaw dropping kicking performance. His movie career may have past, its peak years by 1983, but his physical skills were still sharper than Lone Wolfs sword. This movie may



not be the highlight of his extensive filmography, but it features enough fast paced action to satisfy fans of the Silver Fox. We first see him performing some speedy kicks, on what looks like three boxing training aids. This being a Korean Filmak movie, every time Hwang hits the training aids, we get an odd sound effect on the soundtrack. I'm not 100% sure, but it sounds like they've sampled some of the lasers blast sounds from the 1980's BattleStar Galatica series?.

Filmak regular Baek Hwang-Ki(The Dragons Snake Fist), is the man behind the high energy Kung Fu action. The credits have the Filmak Kung Fu Association down for action duties. Not sure if this even existed? or who was even a member of it, if there was such a group. We first catch a glimpse of Baek, acting like a shady lurker and peering from around a tree at the local temples Martial Arts tournament. He spends most of the movie wondering the countryside starting fights, with his lackeys at his side. Hwang Ki gets to display some nice kicks here too, similar to his role in Leopard Fist Ninja which I reviewed last year. He plays Ling, the on-screen brother/accomplice of Kam Fu.

You'll have to forgive me on not being able to identify some of the performers. Many of the cast only have a couple of movies to their credit, on their HKMDB pages. Despite watching a lot of old school Korean movies, I could only name a handful of the actors involved here. This movie was my first experience of old school Korean style screen combat. While I knew little about the genre at the time, I could see the choreography was different, despite the heavy shapes influence. While Hong Kong movies had starting to move away from the shapes styles by 1983. A style of screen action that was popular in the late 1970's Hong Kong cinema. Korean audiences were still clearly hot for more that of style. The fights don't look as fast to me now, as they once did all those years ago. Having watched a lot more of the undercranked and speeded up action, featured in some 90's Hong Kong movies. That said, Hwang-Ki does a fine job here, anyone who's watched Martial Monks Of Shaolin Temple(1983) will have good idea of what to expect here. Sadly, he only choreographed three movies, the last being Fire Lord where he shared these duties with Casanova Wong.

*"Who the hell do you guys think you are?, smart asses huh" - Dragon Lee*

The film opens with the final two fights, in a tournament being held by the local Buddhist temple. We get some nice staff work in the fight shown over the credits. The second encounter features Wong(Dragon Lee) leaping into the fight. He makes easy work of his opponent, with his usual mix of acrobatics, kicks, flips and animal styles. This movie features one of the Korean dragons most restrained performances. That said, he's still pretty much the character he plays in all his movies. Compared to the last feature I watched starring him The Dragons Infernal Showdown, he's a lot more subdued here. Until we get to the last encounter of the film, but more on that later.

The movie as a-whole, is a lot more sombre and serious. That doesn't mean we don't get a good dose of unintentional, and intentional comedy along the way. When Wong is almost beaten to death, Kam Fu followers are ordered to leave the body outside the palace gates. Not that's a discreet place to leave a body. They go one step further and take his lifeless body out into the countryside. They then lay him down, cover him with a tree branch, while one guy picks up a handful of the Autumn leaves and sprinkles them over him. In another sequence, Kam Fu and his lackeys go to the nearby temple in search of their enemies. Kam's brother Ling looks around the place then says to his brother "Their, not here, but we found this idol". Ling then proceeds to walk off looking really smitten, as if he's just found a winning lottery ticket.

Kam Fu eventually gets what he wants, obtaining not one, not two, not three, but four secret Kung Fu manuals. There's so much secret kung fu in this movie, it all can't be contained in just a single book. The Abbot(Kim Ki-Bum) at the temple claims he's teaching the students Wu Fat Kung Fu, from Northern China. Which I'm certain is just a fabricated style for the movie. When our hero is nursed back to health by one of the temple abbots, who is in disguise. He learns the fictional Lightening Mantis Strike. Getting back to the abbot in disguise, it's that old Martial Arts movie trope, of a character wearing a simple disguise that actually-fools the characters on screen.

One of the movies action highlights, see's Kam Fu batter three students on a bridge. Knocking their bodies around like they were just footballs. If that wasn't enough to prove Hwang Jang Lee's playing yet another bad ass role. In another sequence he uses less energy, and simply grabs two fighters in the ribs with his Eagles Claw technique. The two men simply turn pale and empty their bladders onto the floor. It's a good job Wong has Master Kwok to teach him some secret fighting styles. Wong gets his hands and legs strapped to a log with the use of ropes, it's some weird primitive version of weight lifting equipment. Only you won't see anyone in your local gym performing the moves Dragon Lee does. When the Martial gangsters kill a monk played by Jang Hyo-Seon, it's enough to make our heroes take action.

*"Like the wings of an eagle, we shall fly there and show them who's boss" - Hwang Jang Lee*

Master Kwok shows up alone at Kam's castle, and challenges the villains to fight. Kam's dressed in his usual stylish satin Kung Fu trousers and shirt, complete with The Beatles 1960's style mop top haircut. He's the best dressed fighter in the whole movie, and clearly didn't pay his lackeys much, judging by their clothes. When it looks like Kwok and his panther style, might be overcome by sheer numbers, Wong appears from nowhere. The fight choreography goes up a few notches for the last showdown, and becomes a little more intense. Dragon Lee has clearly been living on a diet of highly caffeinated drinks, while studying with his teacher. Kam breaks out his secret Thunder Foot technique, that leaves flames on the clothes of anyone he connects with. Kwok and Wong make for a great tag team, as they give it their all to stop his feet and fists of fury. We even get shots of fork lighting, to emphasize when certain punches or techniques are used. One of the best sections for me, see's Wong perform flip kicks on Kam. He repeatedly somersaults on the spot, while hitting the super villain under the chin. I lost count after the seventh somersault hit.

Five Pattern Dragon Claws, is more than worth watching/buying if you are fan of the movies stars. Otherwise your better off leaving this title alone. It's not the greatest Korean movie ever made, but it's still a fun hour and thirty minutes. It does suffer from the trappings of a small budget. The sets and costumes are very basic, the cast is pretty limited too. Co-star Kim Ki-Kong(The Dragon, The Young Master) handles Hwang Baek-Kis choreography really well, sadly he's not in the film enough. Korean actress Choe Hui-Jeong is sadly given very little to do also, and she's the only female cast member. The musical score is the usual mixed tracks from Hollywood movie soundtrack, Star Wars and Taxi Driver to name two. During the last fight there appears to be two songs being played simultaneously?. The print is also in really-poor shape, which won't surprise long terms fans of the genre. The Vengeance Video release, which I watched for this review. Is a murky full screen print, that suffers from a lot scratches etc. If you look at the lobby cards released for the movie, you can see the film once looked a lot more colourful.

**Five Shaolin Masters (Taiwan, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - Haven't seen this one in a couple of years. Let's see: non-stop action, bloody deaths, no female character whatsoever beyond a few extras in the city scenes, men training without shirts on with no women to look at them...must be a Chang Cheh film. The choreography is a still a bit primitive compared to Lau Kar-Leung's later films, but there's a variety of weapons and styles on display and some good moments in the 15-minute finale, so I didn't mind. \*spoiler\* I feel sorry for Leung Kar-Yan, who dies in both this movie and *Shaolin Martial Arts* from fatal kicks to the crotch.

**Five Venoms vs. Wu Tang (Taiwan, 1986: Wang Chi-Cheng) -Five Venoms vs. the Ghosts; Kung Fu Vampire Busters; The Venoms vs.the Vampires; Vampire Kid II** - In this Joseph Kuo-produced movie, we follow two pairs of Taoist priests (teachers and apprentices) as one turns out to be malevolent since the master wants to catch a baby Gyonshi in order to use it to control all of the Gyonshi or something - said Gyonshi is eventually protected by a bunch of kids with a fascination for these beings. Meanwhile, there's a really powerful and evil Gyonshi (played by Lu Feng !!) loose who randomly pops up in the film and the benevolent pair tries to help the kids.

First thing I'd like to point out is that out of the "Five Venoms" many of its alternate titles refer to, we only see TWO (and they are two of my favorites of the bunch, which makes me more forgiving), Lu Feng (as a pretty impressive Gyonshi) and Chiang Sheng (I think as the comedic student of the benevolent pair of Taoist priests, but I'm not 100% sure).

Second, it's said to be a horror/Kung Fu movie, and the film has an incredibly awesome start with the first 10 or so minutes showcasing Chiang Sheng's character (I guess) practicing his magic by summoning a musical number and the Gyonshi he has under his spell join in a freaking dance number (a sight to behold, and one of the most hilarious moments I've witnessed in Asian cinema) and he and his master later having to deal with the Lu Feng Gyonshi - there's also a Gyonshi who gets screamed at because he can't bounce over a step, so the priest warns him he'd better eat more and grow taller in his future lives (!!). But once the movie introduces and starts focusing on the baby Gyonshi essentially referred to as "little zombie" (who is apparently born of a woman who died while pregnant - or something, I'm not too sure really) the baddies are after, the film turns into a kid movie with a band of kids being the main protagonists and the adults turning into idiots (only other kids see the difference between actual Gyonshi and kids posing as such, a little girl nearly defeats Lu Feng by turning into what I could best describe as an Asian version of Michael Myers' clown costume...). Thankfully Lu Feng randomly pops up at times and eventually causes trouble (including breaking one of the kids' legs and being pretty brutal with "little zombie") and the mother of the Gyonshi eventually appears to get her baby back (somehow I thought she was defeated, but at least one promise is kept in this film - she does return for him).

**Flag of Iron (Hong Kong, 1980: Chang Cheh)** - Yet another Chang Cheh film I dismissed on first viewing, but now enjoy a great deal. Adapted from Chang's earlier film THE DUEL, this features the awesome Iron Flag gang (awesome because of their cool Dracula capes!), so much backstabbing its a wonder anyone expresses surprise at anything\*, and a very goofy looking character called The Spearman, who dresses in a bizzare Elvis/Jesus Christ Superstar outfit, but is rendered cool by his being accompanied by stock music cues that also turned up in DAWN OF THE DEAD. The English dubbing is truly awful here so thank god for the Mandarin track! The best part of the film is a long section where Phillip Kwok had to defeat a wacky team of wacky assassins - and rather ickily, he dumps their bodies in the well of the teahouse!

**Flash Future Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1983: Kirk Wong)** - Kirk Wong's multi-nominated sophomore effort is quite a puzzler. Expect comparisons to Mad Max, a futuristic battle between traditional martial arts and the neo-Nazi goons of the future. All set to a frenetic synthesizer score and embedded in rough production design. Arguably the latter is where Wong deserves his most acclaim. Clearly not a lot of budget came with this production and instead Wong simply decorates his future with lo-fi, strung-together equipment akin to what Brazil did shortly thereafter to cool effect. Wong almost seems to offer up an arthouse aura as dialogue is kept to a minimum, relying more on atmosphere and the mentioned score. The result is questionable as it certainly isn't much of a film but you stick with it, waiting to see what may come next as very few aspects registers as conventional, even coming from Hong Kong cinema! Eddy Ko, Johnny Wang, Ray Lui stars and Elvis Tsui appears briefly in a fighting role.

**Fly Dragon Mountain, The (Taiwan, 1971: Chan Hung-Man)** - Desperately requesting help and money for his ailing mother, little Erhfutzu receives help from Miss Yun and her company that then moves on. Finding his mother murdered soon thereafter, we cut to Erhfutzu as an adult (Steve Chan), now a swordsman known as Scabbed Tiger and out to revenge the death of his mother. Seeking someone with a particular piece of jade, he finds the one and promptly executes his plan. Bumping into the servant and daughter (Yeung Mung-Wa) of Miss Yun later on, she is grieving the death of her father and as it turns out, it's the victim of Erhfutzu's. Realizing his mistake, he tries to set things as right as possible by going after the right man for his sake and for the sake of Miss Yun's daughter. All while keeping the truth of his actions inside...

Aggressively shot with more than just a nod to Sergio Leone looking at the compositions and music alone, The Fly Dragon Mountain actually lets action mostly play second fiddle to its intriguing twist. Director Chan Hung-Man (The Eight Immortals) captures the torment of Erhfutzu's wrongdoing and despite being a Wuxia piece, Chan maintains an emotional grip on us throughout. It's the main concern. The action is a bit stiff and obviously choreographed but is mesmerizing towards the end when the high flying concept of flying warriors really gets going and Chan's aggressive camera becomes an immersing part as well. Unusual intelligence on display combines quite well with the token swordfighting essentially.

**Flying Dagger (Hong Kong, 1969: Chang Cheh)** - Cheng pei pei gets into trouble with green dragon clan after taking off from business rapist son of their leader. Mysterious man (Lo Lih) appears to scene who can throw knives better than leader of clan, flying dagger...

Average storyline but works well, only disappointing thing was background of Lo Lih that there was no mystery in it really, he learned martial arts from watching others practicing, no formal training. Does not sound too distant from some Shaw stars...I was hoping some kind of connection to green dragon clan here but no. Was not my first view of flick but premiere was many years ago did not remember all. Bodycount was fair, enough to please but there are flicks with higher score. However red stuff was used at times nicely. Lo Lih was heroic but like few times in other flicks too, not totally gentleman and bit cheeky. Cheng pei pei did not get enough to do but as movie was directed by chang cheh, hardly big surprise. Recommended if you are into early shaw swordplay flicks.

**Flying Guillotine, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Ho Meng Hua)** - One of the most unlikely weapons portrayed in kung fu movies has to be the flying guillotine; a basket like device that fits over the victim's head and uses inbuilt blades to decapitate. It's hard to imagine that such a weapon ever actually existed but it makes for a compelling and interesting plot device given the horrific effect it has on the victims.

Chen Kwan Tai plays a member of the Manchu emperor's crack team of assassins all trained in the use of the deadly weapon. While the emperor uses the squad to remove his political enemies with complete ruthlessness, Chen Kwan Tai is in moral turmoil and eventually deserts his duty. The rest of the assassin team are then despatched to capture and kill their former ally.

The well paced story features action at regular intervals. While there is some use of kung fu, well-styled shapes from Chen Kwan Tai in particular, the majority of the fight scenes feature the flying guillotines and these are great fun providing amounts of gore that could put Chang Cheh to shame.

**Flying Guillotine 2 (Hong Kong, 1978: Ching Gong, Hua Shan)** - A sequel in name only to Ho Meng-Hua's 1975 movie, the dual directors takes a shorter and more simple approach to their tale of rebellion against a tyrant with an army carrying flying guillotines. Ti Lung (in a supporting appearance really) and Han people plan to take out Emperor Yung Jing (a terrific Ku Feng). Plotting and violence follows, aided by a fast pace and a pronounced desire to keep things moving. Very noticeable in the editing and camera work, this basic but technically skilled stance makes Flying Guillotine 2 a lot more fun than the more talky and serious 1975 counterpart. A superb depiction of the flying guillotines, fast and exciting (despite not being groundbreaking) action choreography involving said weapons finally showcases how Shaw Brothers could make this unique genre-content come to life on their grand stages. Also with Shih Szu (leading the female troop carrying the titular weapons), Lo Lieh and Wai Wang.

**Flying Killer, The (Taiwan, 1969: Liu Chun)** - Sisters Feng Yao (Ting Ying) and Hsiao Wei have settled down in the thick forests and in their Lady Tarzan outfits where they practice flying all day long. Living with their grandpa (Ma Kei) who once had a firm place in the Feng Yun manor before getting poisoned, one day the girls pick up an unconscious swordsman floating in the river. He is Ku Tien Feng who's escaped an attack on said manor by thieves but his sister is still being held captive. Feng Yao decides to put her fighting and flying skills to the test which starts a battle both in the manor and in the forests...

Several concepts of the different kind makes The Flying Killer mostly avoid the lowest grade. The forest setting feels fresh and every character is not cut out of the standard Wuxia mold to a distressingly obvious degree. With a straight forward plot and plentiful action, the movie lacks the skill of execution though. Ting Ying has an annoying habit of wiping her mouth as a way of displaying character plus weak wirework and stiff action reveals these Taiwan filmmakers still being infants compared to other well developed profiles in the industry such as King Hu. Valiant attempt that you can't stay mad at but ultimately it fades away before the ending.

**Flying Over Grass (Taiwan, 1970: Kim Lung)** – aka **Blood of the Leopard 2** - A little princess is almost killed by a "white haired fox" and she is saved by Cheung Ching Ching, who is helped by a general and his four daughters. They fly away in order to protect the princess and they meet Kong Ban, who presents himself as a vagabond, who he is not as we discover when he helps them to escape to the fox's men. Kong Ban and Cheung Ching Ching use the same flying skill and at the end of the movie, Cheung Ching Ching finally recognizes that Kong Ban is a disciple of the same school as her. Finally, they succeed in saving the princess and they confess that they are imperial envoys (if I understood well ; as the movie is in Italian language, I'm not sure of all what I explain...). Though this movie is presented as "Blood of the leopard 2" on hkmdb, it has nothing to do with the movie Blood of the leopard, also with Kong Ban and Cheung Ching Ching, as it's a movie from 1970 and Blood of the leopard is from 1972. The first is a swordplay movie, while the second is a punch and block movie.

That's a very good movie too, with a good story and good fights, and Kong Ban and Cheung Ching are superb as usual (all those who are reading me are going to think that my appreciations aren't very different from a movie to another, but I'm a crazy fan of these two and I love all what they do !!!). Worth to watch.

**Flying Swallow (Taiwan, 1978: William Cheung)** – aka **Ninja Swords of Death; True Master** - The Ocean Shores dubbed version seems to have been cut at least 20 minutes, with plot threads abruptly abandoned, too-rapid scene changes, quick leaps of time, and deleted gore. Whether an uncut version would be any better, is hard to tell. Once his screen image became firmly established in the mid-1970's, Tien Peng played the same character over and over: the cool, confident, heroic warrior who never gets riled up, deadly, yet kind and considerate. (Indeed, his kindness is often all that really distinguishes him from his arrogant opponents.) Tien does indeed have stellar charisma. The film starts off with a martial arts tournament in which a variety of weapons are used, but afterwards the film is primarily

a standard circa-1980 swordplay film, with a very weak plot. (And concerning that martial arts tournament, it really makes no sense. Who would volunteer to compete in such a tournament, where every elimination round is a fight to the death?) Chia Ling has second billing, but she doesn't appear until nearly the end of the film, and she is only in one scene, with some brief sparring swordplay and dialogue. I found this film to be a major disappointment, made even worse by the annoying subplot of the jealous fat guy. Probably the best thing about this film is the really neat sound effect when two swords clash together. If you are going to watch this film, don't expect much else.

**Forbidden Killing (Hong Kong, 1970: Wong Ping)** - In the beginning of the movie, Chu Mu kills a little girl's parents while they arrive on the beach on a boat. Then, we see a young noble and his father in their house while the father gives a document to his son. They are attacked by some bandits and the father is killed while the young noble (Chang Pin) is badly hurt. The bandits chase him in the forest and he is saved by a young girl (Chen Man Ling) who lives there with her grandfather. I suppose that it's the little girl of the beginning of the movie, but I'm not sure.

Later, we discover that the bandits were on Chu Mu's orders and when he knows who is Chen Man Ling's grandfather, he goes to his house and kills him. Then, Chang Pin and Chen Man Ling get revenge on Chu Mu (who uses a fake iron arm in which a blade is hidden) and, though they are both hurt, they succeed in it and return to Chen Man Ling's home. That's an interesting movie with very good fights. Worth watching.

**Four Hands of Death (Hong Kong, 1980: Chu Lo-Kong) – aka Wily Match** - Jimmy Lee gets a rare leading role in this wacky kung fu comedy. It's not a great movie or anything, but it's a lot of fun. Jimmy Lee is hired to help a wealthy old man with his son. What I mean by that is that his son is like a big kid and Jimmy Lee is hired to help keep him under control. The son is played by Cheng Fu Hung, a huge Chinese guy who has been in a ton of kung fu movies. He has to be close to 6 and a half feet tall and over 300 pounds. So he gets into all kinds of trouble with Jimmy Lee, mainly stuff involving a girl that he likes, and the story ends up coming down to the villain of the movie (Sun Jung Chi) wanting to get a Buddha from Cheng Fu Hung's father (played by Chan Wai Lau). This leads to a big showdown at the end.

The fighting is good. This movie is obviously a low budget production, but they make the most out of it. The villain Sun Jung Chi is on fire (he played the crazy monk who drinks wine and eats meat in *Shaolin vs Lama*). This is one of the few movies where he had a big role. Why didn't he get more big roles like this? I wish I knew. Jimmy Lee gives a good acting and fighting performance, and shows that he could have been a lead actor in many more movies. He gets into tons of fights. At least 5 that I remember. The action is done by Peng Kong, the same guy who did the action for *Shaolin vs Lama*, *The Leg Fighters*, *Woman Avenger* and *A Life of Ninja*. I am always fascinated by his choreography because he is the best at doing wrestling moves, and there's a fun wrestling match in this movie. The big wrestler guy from *A Life of Ninja* (Wong Kin-Mi) faces Cheng Fu Hung, and it's a real battle of the heavyweights. I can't believe the falls that Cheng Fu Hung takes. You can see the Earth shaking! It's not as good of a wrestling match as the one in *Life of Ninja*, but it's still pretty dang good. This wrestler guy that fights Cheng Fu Hung worked with Yuen Woo Ping on *Drunken Tai Chi* (in a very short scene), he worked with Robert Tai on *Shaolin Chastity Kung Fu*, and Jackie Chan on *Fearless Hyena*, but leave it to Peng Kong to get the best out of him. I'm rambling a bit, so now seems a good time to wrap up the review and mention that the final fight is 15 minutes long (no joke).

I went over pretty much all of the notable actors, but one more I should mention is Chan Gwan Biu, who played the rival prince to Norman Chu in *Rebellious Reign*. He plays Sun Jung Chi's main guy and definitely looks competent in his fights, but he doesn't get much time to show his stuff. Maybe 5 minutes.

So overall, it's a slightly above average movie. Maybe a little too much comedy, the story is pretty worthless, and the movie drags quite a bit, but Jimmy Lee and Cheng Fu Hung are great together. If you don't like comedy with your kung fu, you may want to stay away from this. I liked it, and I laughed out loud a lot. Seeing Cheng Fu Hung trying to kiss Sun Jung Chi (to scare him) but instead smack his face on a tree is priceless.

**Four Invincible, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Wa Yan)** - What looks like retard kung-fu being briefly demonstrated at the top of *The Four Invincible* coheres later on into a fun piece of kung-fu entertainment. Ching Lei (Ku Feng) is part of the Hung Clan that has strict punishment for disobedience, including amputation. Kicked out and crippled therefore, we cut to 16 years later where the leader of the clan (Jeng Kei-Ying) and his men roam the town to punish whatever

comes in their path. Their tour among other things results in a mute (Hon Gwok-Choi), they blind a local fortune teller (To Siu-Ming) and chop off the arm of the character played by Dai Sai-An (also co-action director). Wanting revenge but possessing no skills, they're taken in by Ching Lei and slowly the crippled men become crippled avengers...

Yes, Crippled Avengers is the film that should spring to mind when watching The Four Invincible but this production has chops of its own. Being quite fierce and brutal in its ways, director Wa Yan uses the concept well and rarely stray outside of moods. The lightness that is allowed makes sense and with the dependable Ku Feng present, the slight dip into personal drama even works. Real martial arts action is let loose very late but is of stellar quality with only the actual handicapped kung-fu being a concept that doesn't fly. Thankfully, the movie doesn't hinge on its inclusion funnily enough.

**Four Riders (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Cheh)** - The period from 1971 – 1972 could well be referred to as 'The Iron Triangle on Tour' era. The term 'Iron Triangle' came about as a reference to the collaborations between director Chang Cheh, and his two favourite leading men of the era, Ti Lung and David Chiang. Many of their collaborations proved to be a recipe for box office success, and the trio churned out 9 movies alone during the 2 years mentioned, all for the Shaw Brothers studio. During 1971 they went to Bangkok together, and made 'Duel of Fists', then hit the streets of Tokyo a year later to make a sequel, titled 'The Angry Guest'. However Thailand and Japan weren't their only destination during this period, as they also travelled to Korea, during which time they made 'Four Riders'.

By 1972 the Shaw Brothers studio already had a number of Korean talents working for them. During the same year director Cheng Chang-ho made the seminal classic 'King Boxer', while fellow director Chang Il-ho made 'The Deadly Knives' and 'The Thunderbolt Fist' (which also had a Korean star in the form of James Nam). Surprisingly then, outside of the location shooting and some of the extras, 'Four Riders' features no local Korean talent. In a way it's understandable, Golden Harvest founder Raymond Chow also travelled to Korea the same year and made 'Hapkido', which was the first time for the likes of Whang In-shik and Ji Han-jae to really show off their talents. By the end of the decade, the thought of filming a production in Korea and featuring zero Taekwondo or Hapkido practitioners would be an unthinkable one.

While this could be considered a missed opportunity (especially when you consider how much Muay Thai was showcased in 'Duels of Fists' and 'The Angry Guest'), the fact that 'Four Riders' is from the era when everyone involved was in their prime, makes it easy to forgive. Lung and Chiang weren't the only pair with whom Cheh had forged a successful working relationship, with action choreographers Lau Kar Leung and Tong Gaai equally contributing to the popularity of his output. By the time of 'Four Riders', Kar Leung and Gaai had choreographed over 20 of the directors movies together, dating back to 'The Magnificent Trio' from 1966. Here the duo had plenty of martial arts talent to work with, as joining Lung and Chiang to complete the 'Four Riders' of the title, are fellow Shaw regulars Chen Kuan Tai and Wong Chun.

The title is a reference to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, as read by a bible brandishing Chen Kuan Tai to his nurse girlfriend, and alluding to the characters themselves. The best thing about this scene is that, as Kuan Tai reads the passage, scenes of the horsemen in battle play concurrently via a split screen, indicating that if Chang Cheh had ever decided to make a biblical adaptation, it would have been suitably epic and bloody. I question whether these scenes were filmed specifically for this sequence, or if perhaps they're unused footage from 'The Heroic Ones' made 2 years prior, however in either case, they work within the context of the scene.

The setting for the movie itself is July 1953, immediately after the end of the Korean War. Ti Lung plays a Chinese G.I. stationed in one of the Korean army bases, and having declared to his superior that he no longer works for him now that the war's over, tears off his stripes and instigates a mass brawl. While the other G.I.'s are busy fighting each other, Lung takes the opportunity to steal a jeep. Armed with his army pay-out and no plans for the future, his only goal is to drive to Seoul and live it up for as long as he can. On the way he picks up another wandering G.I., played by Wong Chun (who amusingly jumps off a wall into the jeep as it's driving past, reminding us that amongst all of Cheh's trademark macho heroics, he always had an eye for the goofy), and the pair make their way to Seoul together.

Much like Cheh's Thailand and Japan set productions, the pairs drive into the Seoul cityscape play out like a travelogue, as the camera lingers and takes in the surrounding sights and monuments, all the while played to a funky 70's lounge track. Indeed despite the setting supposedly being 1953, it's a hard sell to say the least. The music, fashion, and even surroundings are all distinctly 1972. Most glaringly, in a latter nightclub scene, Cheh can't seem to resist the opportunity to do a similar travelogue like montage of Seoul's neon sign lit streets, further indicating that

the reference to 1953 is almost supposed to be taken as thematic rather than literal. Chun has plans to visit his friend in hospital that was wounded in action, played by Chen Kuan Tai, and the pair go their separate ways upon arriving in the Korean capital.

It's worth noting that Chiang also plays a G.I., one who is already in Seoul, and spends all of his time witling away his money in a hostess bar (amusingly named 'Hello John!') with Shaw Brothers starlet Lily Li. Chiang doesn't actually meet the others until over an hour in, but he's present throughout, as the story establishes his friendship with Lung. It's when Lung is framed for murder that he's reunited with Chun, as the hospital also doubles as a temporary prison, and his insistence that he's innocent prompts his new friend to get to the bottom of what's gone down. In fact Lung has been framed by the gangster than runs 'Hello John!', which acts as a front to recruit money hungry and jobless G.I.'s to act as drug mules to shift product, imported from Japan, to the U.S.

The Japan connection is significant, as it explains the casting of a fresh faced Yasuaki Kurata as the gangster in question. It was director Cheh that gave Kurata his break in Hong Kong, with 'The Angry Guest' being his debut from the same year. Interestingly the Japanese star spent the remainder of the 70's in independent bashers, only once returning to the Shaw Brothers studio to feature in Lau Kar Leung's 1978 masterpiece, 'Heroes of the East'. Decked out in a sharp black suit, he certainly looks the part, and exudes a menacing cool. Until we get to the scenes in which he interacts with his American boss, and he's suddenly dubbed into English by what sounds like a softly spoken teenage boy. In fact all of the cast are dubbed at various points in the movie, either to speak English, or more frequently to speak Korean.

'Four Riders' deals with some interesting themes, even if they're not explored in a particularly competent way. Chang Cheh was, after all, called the Godfather of the Kung Fu Film, not the Godfather of Existentialism. However the theme of the G.I.'s becoming aimless wanderers after the war creates some moments that resonate. In one particular scene, a guards asks Lung why everyone is fighting as he drives out of the base in his newly acquired jeep, to which he responds, "I wouldn't know. But still, it's been a long war. They've got to fight somebody." The movie also opens and closes with wide shots of Korea's snow covered countryside, which play out in silence, allowing us to occasionally glimpse the outline of 4 figures wading through the harsh landscape, before focusing on a single flower that's bloomed from the bitter conditions. Indeed the war may be over, but beauty takes time to return.

However more than anything, 'Four Riders' is, like any Chang Cheh flick, about the action. While there are several brawls throughout, including an intense throwdown between Chiang and Kurata at the 40 minute mark, the extended finale is really the highlight. Lung, Chun, and Kuan Tai face off against a horde of about 50 attackers in a gymnasium (which of course, comes with a trampoline), in a skirmish that literally has bodies flying all over the screen, while Chiang throws down against an equally ferocious group of attackers in the bar. Watching this particular scene again now, I can't help but feel that Gareth Evans was giving it a nod with the scene in 'The Raid 2', in which Yayan Ruhian is ambushed in a remarkably similar setting. Chiang has never looked more furious than he does here, even more so than in the finale of 'Vengeance!', as he stomps on heads, delivers kicks to the face, and even scalps someone amidst a joyous amount of collateral damage.

The brawl in the gym is equally energetic, which has Lung at one point brandishing a barbell as a weapon, providing the Shaw Brothers fake blood department with plenty of work. The scene even throws in an early example of heroic bloodshed, giving an indicator of how Cheh's apprentice John Woo developed his style. The sheer number of opponents the trio have to fend off, and the flow of choreography to coordinate such a mass showdown, is a joy to watch. Even Kurata enjoys it, who spends the initial stages calmly brandishing a Winchester rifle as he watches on, cigarette hanging from his lips. Watching any Chang Cheh movie of this nature, you know how it's going to end, and 'Four Riders' delivers the characters of its title a worthy finale, providing a liberal helping of fists, feet, bullets, and bloody mayhem.

As a self-confessed fan of this era from Chang Cheh's filmography, for me 'Four Riders' is on par with the likes of 'The Duel' and 'Blood Brothers' as the cream of the crop. Sure it gets goofy, such as the surveillance camera in the gangsters office being able to follow a fight around the room when being watched on TV. But for every goofy scene, you have one that exudes macho cool, like when Chiang confidently swigs directly from a bottle of Johnnie Walker, and Kurata calmly puts a bullet through it courtesy of a gun fitted with a silencer. For whatever reason, 'Four Riders' often seems to be overlooked when discussing Cheh's best movies, so if you haven't seen it, do yourself a favour and check it out.

**Four Shaolin Challengers, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Ngai Hoi Fung)** - A group of Wong Fei-Hung's students join together to rid their neighborhood of Triads in this fairly solid old-school flick. It starts off slow and comes off more

as a parable against the evils of gambling, but picks up steam towards the end, which culminates in a good three-on-three melee where ordinary items like umbrellas turn into deadly weapons. There's nothing really great in here to set this film apart from the legion of other old-school movies, but the fighting is done well and should provide some entertainment for fans of the genre.

**14 Amazons (Hong Kong, 1972: Cheng Kang, Charles Tung)** - After General Yang Ye and all his sons have been killed by Tien Feng and his sons (Lo Lieh being the most ferocious of them), all the women of the Yang clan decide to go to war in order to save the country and take revenge for their family, though the King doesn't agree to this. They are helped by Yueh Hua, who was prisoner in Tien Feng's camp and escape in order to tell the women that they are about to be ambushed. Superb historical swordplay movie, with a lot of twists and good ideas : the human bridge had impressed me when I first saw the movie, and I was still impressed when I rewatched it. Ling Po is excellent as one of the widows who has been designed as the commander of the troupes by her grand-mother-in-law.

**Friends (Hong Kong, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - International favorites David Chiang and Alexander Fu Sheng (winner of the Best Newcomer Award at the Asian Film Festival) star in this tale of a young man fighting kidnappers and wanting to find his own place with his life.

This was very good movie. David Chiang works well with Fu Sheng and always works well with Lily Li. The story is really good. This movie is more of a drama where Fu Sheng and David Chiang are both great in this movie. Fu Sheng's character was bored with his life and he wanted to feel comfortable. He wanted Friends. David Chiang plays a painter. I liked the look on his face when people were staring at his painting. He was asking them what is the problem? Lu Ti, who is a great actor plays Fu Sheng's Father. He is a great actor. His acting I have seen over and over again in Generation Gap, Street Gangs of Hong Kong, Young Rebel, etc. This is a great movie which I definitely recommend.

The action is pretty good, but this is really more of a drama and an action showcase for David Chiang and Fu Sheng.

David Chiang and Fu Sheng get my standout performance. Fu Sheng won an award for this and I can see why. David Chiang was great, again. He was great with his acting and his chemistry with the other actors.

**From the Highway (Hong Kong, 1970: Zhang Zengze)** - Being made about 6 months prior to 'The Chinese Boxer' this is regarded as the first modern kung fu film and was the first to be shot in colour. Cathay may well have been the first but in terms of action choreography they were a fair way behind their rivals at Shaw Brothers.

With obvious American western influences the story concerns a group of bandits, led by the incredibly hard-headed 'Iron Gourde', trying to take control of a heavily guarded town. When initial attempts fail they send in a small group disguised as street performers. Luckily for the village a sworn enemy of 'Iron Gourde' also arrives looking for revenge for the death of his father.

This really can't be watched with the same expectations as the kung fu films that followed soon after. The story is rather slow paced and there isn't any real action for the first 45 minutes or so. What there is is good drama and character development and the film has a very accomplished feel in terms of production values, cinematography and acting. There are some nice camera movements here and there indicating a competent production team.

The action choreography however is very primitive, but entertaining, with no stylised martial arts techniques whatsoever. In fact it reminded me more of the style of fighting seen in Kwan Tak Hing's movies from 20 years earlier (and more). Things do pick up quite a bit come the end though but it is more the use of some interesting weaponry (spiked ball on a chain) than real martial arts that makes it enjoyable. Worth seeing as a curiosity.

**Fugitive, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Tseng-Chai)** - Siu Lao (Lieh) and Ma Tien Piao (Feng) are bandits who ride from town to town holding up banks and killing anyone who tries to stop them using their superb and rapid fire shooting skills. When a holdup goes wrong, Siu sends Ma away with the cash and tells him that if he is caught to try and rescue him later. Siu is tortured and as time passes he realizes his sworn brother isn't coming for him instead setting up a bandit gang to carry on with murdering and banditry. Siu manages to escape and heads for Ma's encampment to settle some scores.



This film, obviously modeled after the Italian Spaghetti Westerns, is very exciting and bloody with enough wild gun battles for at least half a dozen spaghetti's. At only 76 minutes, the film chugs along at a brisk pace and the action seldom lets up. This becomes a slight problem as very few scenes are allowed to breathe but then, action is the main attraction here. This being a lower tier Shaw movie in that it's mostly style over substance, there are a few polished scenes. There's lots of well done tracking shots and the first meeting of Siu and Ma after Siu breaks out of jail is nicely done utilizing the 'Man With A Harmonica' piece from ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST.

The opening and finale are memorable as well as Siu's jailbreak and also the scene where he is attacked by dozens of killers sent by Ma in Death Valley. There are some great locations that also ape the Italian western nicely. About the only thing I can say that's even remotely negative is that rarely does anyone ever run out of bullets. This is a constant complaint from critics in the Italian westerns but here it's way OOT. It's fine for me but someone who takes these things seriously may be put off by it.

Also, there is a preponderance of zoom ins and zoom outs that populate the film. Some may be put off by the one or two against a hundred scenario that dominates the action setpieces. This was a staple of Chang Cheh where his films would feature a near invincible hero fighting against impossible odds knowing full well he would in all probability be killed in battle covered in blood, his guts spilling out. The same thing applies here only swords have been replaced with guns.

There is also minimal use of kung fu on display. The accent is on gunplay and even these scenes are laced with kung fu or 'gun fu' to be more precise. The sets as usual for Shaw Brothers movies are meticulous and quite amazing considering they produced anywhere from 40 to 50 movies a year(!) Even the lesser Shaw movies could be counted on to have some great sets if nothing else.

Lo Lieh, as most always is very good here showcasing a nice range of emotion in this role. He is at first a criminal but has a change of heart later in the film. This being a Shaw Brothers movie, there is much tragedy on hand and Lo Lieh gets a lot of it leading up to the big battle at the end. Lo even gets his hands smashed (again) to keep him from handling a gun. A similar scene, but more violent, occurs in the first international kung fu hit KING BOXER (aka 5 FINGERS OF DEATH) from the same year. This being a Spaghetti Western done Shaw Brothers style, this sequence owes more to DJANGO (1966) I would say.

The award winning actor Ku Feng again displays another great villain role. Feng, who also would play a hero from time to time made some memorable movies playing incredibly sadistic bad guys. Here, he's a treacherous scoundrel who on several occasions uses lies and trickery to get out of a jam against Siu.

Sammo Hung even has a brief bit as a bandit that gets killed by Lo Lieh. He gets a couple of lines beforehand, though. It's quite interesting to see Hung in a Shaw movie considering his famous output for Golden Harvest.

This is the only film I've seen of director Tsang Tseng Chai but he handles the action scenes very well even though the bulk of the film looks as if the cinematographer suffered from ADD. One minute you get a nice tracking shot, the next minute the camera lens is all over the place zooming in and out at a rapid pace.

In keeping with the homage to Euro westerns, various musical cues are lifted from Italian oaters and also the actors are given stubble and have a very sweaty, unclean appearance to assimilate the style of the Spaghetti's. Definitely a step up from Chang Cheh's Martial "Spaghetti's" in terms of emulating the formula, Chang directed at least three films similar in style to spaghetti westerns--THE SAVAGE FIVE (1974), THE ANONYMOUS HEROES (1969) and THE INVINCIBLE FIST (1969) also starring Lo Lieh. All three are good films in their own right but THE FUGITIVE (1972) captures the flavor of the Euroaters perfectly. A thrilling, action packed and bloody film for fans of both genres.

**Furious, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Joseph Kong) – The Furious Killer** - As you may have seen, I've been going through something of a bad patch of late. Beginning with Apostic assigning me The Apple for B-Masters "Secret Santas" roundtable, I've been assaulted by a greater-than-normal percentage of movies that sucked. *Raptor, The Beauties and the Beast, Wired to Kill, Abraxas...* Not all of them have earned my "COLD" rating (which I reserve for those movies that literally have me shaking my fist at the screen), but not a one of these movies was worth the effort of watching. It's starting to sap my strength of will; winder doldrums like these, I don't need.

And this movie... More of the same, I'm afraid.

Granted, expecting quality from a "fake Bruce Lee" movie is tantamount to searching your own poop for gold (unless you're really sure you swallowed that filling). But still. Someone went to the trouble of reproducing and packaging the movie for human consumption, and it presumably wasn't the director's mom. Call my Pollyannish, but I'd always like to think that there's got to be something worth seeing in every movie, right?

To start the confusion, I'm not even sure which one "Bruce Le" is. The box proudly proclaims his name as star, but the photo is obviously not from this movie (The Furious isn't a period drama, unless you want to count the '70's), and Le's face is an angle that makes it darned hard to recognize him in the movie. You can see above that none of the credits on the actual print read "Bruce Le" (my guess is that he adopted the name a little later), and anyway there are no closing credits, so I can't see which actor played which part. (That also accounts for the cross-cultural massacre of character names below.) Not that knowing which actor was making a buck off of a dead martial arts genius would really enhance my viewing pleasure anyway.

Anyway. The story starts in Indonesia, which I didn't know until half an hour into the movie; there were probably several subtle clues to let an East Asian audience know that it was Indonesia, but as far as I'm concerned, unless they've got a big-ass sign saying "Welcome to Indonesia!" in one of the establishing shots, I will perversely assume that a Kong Hong action movie is set in Hong Kong. Anyhoo: A drug pusher visits his usual customers, then gets chased by two guys who shoot at him repeatedly. It's only after he catches them that we find out the two are cops, and moreover, they just wanted the guy as an informant to snitch on his boss. (Which wouldn't have worked well if they had perforated him, so it's just as well that they're lousy shots.)

Said boss is Tu Pao, a younger badass in the underworld (could this be Bruce Le?), and his shipment is supposed to come in tomorrow, so the cops, led by Officer Cha (could this be Bruce Le?), hide near the seashore where Tu Pao is to meet a boat, ready to apprehend him as soon as the deal is made on the shore. Naturally, a couple of nuns choose this moment to lead their class on a beach field trip, and so when the cops try to apprehend the evildoers, Tu Pao grabs a fat kid as a hostage and drives like hell. The cops follow, Tu Pao ditches the car (now smoking inexplicably) and the knocked-out kid behind and scampers off, and the cops arrive just in time for the car to explode for no apparent reason except Tu Pao's evil influence.

Cha then tries to find Tu Pao by, um, entering crummy-looking apartments at random, lambasting the occupants, and searching for five seconds. At least, that's what it looked like he was doing; granted, he apparently knew the occupants from earlier run-ins, but there seemed to be very little rhyme or reason to his investigation. (There is, however, a thug in a wife-beater who's dubbed in a pathetic Cockney accent, which will also show up in another minor character's mouth later on.)

The action then moves to Hong Kong, where a young Romeo schmoozing his girlfriend inexplicably gets some kind of "Keep your hands to yourself" talking-to from Police Inspector Ho. (This is the one person that I can guarantee is not Bruce Le; it's Hwang Ka Tat, better known as Carter Wong, who is a pretty recognizable face for the chop-socky movie fan.) Ho then meets Cha at the station, as Tu Pao is rumored to be in Hong Kong, seeking to exchange twenty pounds of drugs for protection.

Ho demonstrates that the Indonesian police are not alone in their counterintuitive and generally unsuccessful investigative methodology, as his basic strategy is to get all of his detectives to descend as a body on a number of sleazy nightclubs, street, pushers, pimps, etc., get belligerent in everyone's face, and start kung fu fights; they consistently leave the premises without any more information than they started. (Given that the police are both stupid and disagreeable, it's no surprise to me that the criminal underworld is so strong in Hong Kong; hell, if I encountered one of these cops, my next stop would probably be at my local triad's recruiting office.)

Tu Pao lays low for a month, though, until approaching Hong Kong kingpin Chang Ki (way too old to be Bruce Le), one of those tough-as-nails criminals who has his henchmen attack him and wipes the floor with them for practice. Tu Pao wants to sell him the drugs for a cut rate and join his organization; Chang Ki gives him a test; make three hits for him, and Tu Pao is in.

With the cops always far behind and trying to catch up, Tu Pao takes out Chang Ki's enemies: a quartet playing Mah Jongg and making sexual innuendos (kung-fued into submission and set on fire), a bodybuilder (kung-fued into submission and then strangled with a shower curtain in the gym), and some gang fellow who had just finished sex with his girl (which explains why he didn't need much kung-fuing to tire him out -- and hey, at least he died right after sex, rather than right before). Each scene is padded out, because we need to make a full movie out of this, so we get a looong scene of tense Mah Jongg strategy (which might have been more interesting if I knew squat about Mah Jongg), a long scene of BodyBoulder Boy admiring his pecs, and a long scene of a couple making the beast with two backs.

Unfortunately, one of the fire victims survives, and manages to ID Tu Pao for Inspector Ho. He then figures out the plot: If all of Chang Ki's rivals are getting hit, then Tu Pao is hooking up with Chang Ki! (Ho declares that the M.O. in all the killings has been the same -- said M.O. apparently being too stupid to bring a gun, and instead having a knock-down-drag-out fight with each mark.) And yet, after all the detective work involved in figuring that out, it

becomes moot, as a mole in Chang Ki's employees gives the cops the same information anyway. On the day that Tu Pao and Chang Ki are to meet face to face and exchange the drugs (and kiss the ring, or whatever it is that thugs do to swear fealty to triad lords), the cops do a piss-poor job of surrounding the house, so that even when they come in shooting and kung fu fighting, Tu Pao manages to get away.

He manages to get himself to Thailand, where he has a brother who will protect him, but since Cha knows Tu Pao has a brother in Thailand, he and Ho get themselves there first (Tu Pao took a boat, the two cops hopped a plane) and are waiting there for him, where they have the final climactic two-against-one kung fu fight. The end.

Quite frankly, this movie wasn't worth the effort it took to tell you about it, much less come up with any insightful conclusions. I simply didn't care -- not about Tu Pao, not about Cha, not about Ho. Not one of them was interesting or sympathetic enough to want to spend 90 minutes in their company. Whole sections of the movie were present for no other reason than to get us further from the beginning but no nearer the conclusion (SEE the thrilling play-by-play Mah Jongg action!), and the kung fu -- which was the reason for the whole exercise -- was stingy, and none too thrilling when it finally erupted.

It doesn't matter that Bruce Le was here, unidentified or not; the movie as a whole was tepid enough that the real Bruce Lee wouldn't have been able to spice it up.

**Furious Dragon (1973)** - After witnessing his father's murder by corrupt officials and their Japanese supporters, Ting Shung is poisoned by them to prevent him from talking and he becomes mute. 10 years later Ting is now a kung fu expert and seeks vengeance on those responsible for his father's death. (Thanks to AliAlshamary for these two sentences that begin the review. Mine is the following text).

Among the corrupt officers, there is Tieh Yeh, whose daughter is kidnapped by Ting Shung while she is on her way back from school. As days pass by, the two young people become friends and later, they fall in love, but when she discovers that Ting Shung plans to kill her father, Fan Ling begs him to give up his revenge and he lets her go (if I remember well).

Finally, Tien Yeh and his men are confronted to Ting Shung and during the fight, Fan Ling tries to prevent her father to kill the man she loves, and it's her who is finally killed, and Tien Yeh becomes mad when he realises that he has killed his own daughter. As I watched this movie a long while ago, I don't remember if he kills himself, or if Ting Shung kills him or if Ting Shung leaves, thinking that his revenge is accomplished since Tien Yeh has lost his daughter. Superb movie, worth watching.

**Furious Slaughter (Hong Kong, 1972: Ding Sin-Saai)** - Jimmy Wang Yu arrives with cool and confidence and starts cleaning up gambling and prostitution. No horde or multiple waves of opponents stands in the way of him either. Standardized Wang Yu vehicle but within a short running time and Wang Yu dependently disposing of tons of enemies, Furious Slaughter does its job without impressing that much. That is before the finale hits that responds very well to the English title of the film and we get nigh on distressing violence here in a welcome turn.

**Fury Of King Boxer (Taiwan, 1972: Ding Sin-Saai)** - Ding Sin-Saai dipped in a worse way into history for Everlasting Glory in 1975, employing major historical facts and creating utter boredom in the process. Fury Of King Boxer takes an important template, about the rebels that eventually managed to create the Chinese Republic, but thankfully decides to mix it up with that pesky notion of creating bearable action cinema too. Gwok Siu-Chung is Chow Ken, the female revolutionary that left behind wealth and family to pursue her dream of not being one of them oppressed Chinese. Jimmy Wang Yu is one of her closest, able men and while patriotic dialogue comes off as really awkward (as well as other cinema choices when in this mode), the film is well anchored by mayhem. Featuring a handful of superbly epic action scenes, in particular the ones featuring Wang Yu where he uses knives, guns, bayonets and his resolve that makes him beat about a million opponents. It all might play out as somebody's treasured history but to most others, it's quite a superb ride for large amounts of the running time.

**Gambling for Head (Hong Kong, 1975: Jimmy Shaw)** - Our hero is an expert fighter and fisherman. His wife dies in childbirth. He can make big money as the bouncer at the brothel or casino but he has an agenda against those

people. When he meets one of them he says "You owe me (fill in a body part) and they fight to the death. The money problems get worse when the child needs to go to the hospital and his buddy gambles away their last dollar.

The movie gets a little weird when Chiang Nan, on a losing streak, stabs himself in the leg and asks for \$2. The casino boss comes out and gives him his \$2 in losses back and has him leave to avoid a scene. Somehow this concept of associating gambling loss to self injury escalates to the point of the hero dumping a bag of heads out on the game table. I didn't get it.

Bruce Leung Siu-Lung is the action director. The fights are frequent and good. It's all standard stuff, well choreographed and executed with focus and power. There is just nothing special or memorable. Overall I rate it average for the year and genre.

**Game of Death (Hong Kong/USA, 1978: Robert Clouse)** – Before his untimely passing, Bruce Lee had begun work on a project called *Game of Death*. I admittedly don't know much about the film's history, but I do know that he had managed to film the climatic fight scenes before his passing. A couple of years after his passing, with the help of doubles, editing, and a new script, the movie *Game of Death* was released. I don't know how well it fared in the movie theatres back then. What I do know is that it's not very well-liked today. It gets a lot of bad ratings and criticism, when in fact it is actually a very solid martial arts film. In fact, it's actually (take a deep breath here) one of my favorites.

After a James Bondian opening title sequence, the movie begins with a fight scene being filmed. The fight is between Billy Lo (Bruce Lee and Kim Tai-Chung) and Chuck Norris (courtesy of Return of the Dragon stock footage). After the fight scene is done being filmed, a light fixture falls on the set, almost hitting Billy. It's dismissed as an accident and Billy goes to his trailer to find a suspicious man in there. The man is Steiner (Hugh O'Brien), one of the head goons working for "The Syndicate," an organized crime outfit who enjoys sponsoring celebrities in order to cash in on their success. Steiner threatens Billy about not joining them, who responds by punching Steiner in the face.

Reporting back to his superior, the diabolical Dr. Lan (Dean Jagger), Steiner tells of Billy Lo's increasing resistance to their efforts to get him to join them. Suggesting that they "squeeze" him a little more, Steiner and his motorcycle-driving goons attack Billy, who's going out with his singer girlfriend, Ann (Coleen Camp). They get the upper-hand and leave him beaten in the street with the command to call them the next day.

That evening, Billy and Ann have dinner with Jim Marshall (Gig Young), Billy's journalist friend. Jim warns Billy of the Syndicate and what they do when one of their celebrities is having difficulties (cut to a scene of James Tien being beaten by Kareem Abdul Jabbar). Billy expresses his desire to resist and decides to go see his uncle (Roy Chiao) for advice.

The next day, Billy goes to see his uncle. Their meeting is interrupted by the appearance of the Syndicate, including Karl Miller (Robert Wall) and Pasqual (Dan Inosanto). Billy manages to hold them off but eventually is taken down by them and is left a final warning. When he doesn't call back, the Syndicate decides to make an example out of him.

Knowing that there's no way out, Billy decides to finish his last movie and then take them on. He warns Ann to leave Hong Kong and go back to the USA, so she doesn't get caught in the cross-fire. On the set of his last movie (which from what I gather, is an interesting mix of Return of the Dragon and The Chinese Connection), Billy is shot in the head by a Syndicate guy dressed as an extra. I find it interesting that this happens to Bruce Lee's character in this film and then his real-life son Brandon Lee was killed essentially the same way on the set of *The Crow*. Coincidence? What do you think?

While in the hospital, Billy, Jim, and Billy's personal physician decide to fake to his death. That way he can once again lead a normal life and be free of the Syndicate's grasp and live in peace forever...yeah, but not before getting violent revenge and beating them all to a bloody pulp. I have a naïve question: It isn't that ethical for a doctor to knowingly fake a patient's death, is it? I mean, if the government gave the go-ahead, that'd be one thing. Maybe Billy Lo had a lot of "umph" or the Hong Kong officials were just incompetent/corrupt enough to let that slide. But then, what do I know?

So Billy's death is faked and he undergoes reconstructive surgery while his girlfriend is having a nervous breakdown at the funeral. While she's recuperating, she has a visit from the Syndicate and recognizes the assassin from the movie set. When she's released, she decides to take the law into her own hands. So that makes two of them. That also ends the first half of our film.

In the second half of the movie, Billy Lo seeks revenge against all the guys in the Syndicate. Imagine a Kill Bill-esque list with the following names on it:

1. Karl Miller
2. Those dudes on the motorcycles
3. Stick
4. Pasqual
5. Ji Han Jae
6. Hakim
7. Steiner
8. Dr. Lan

The story is nothing new, as we've seen Bruce Lee pushed over the edge before. Bruce Lee in reality only really comes into the movie for the climax. The Billy Lo for the majority of the film is played by Kim Tai-Chung. You can tell that they were trying to mask the fact it wasn't Bruce Lee. There's a lot camera shots from behind or shots of Kim in a beard and huge dark sunglasses. Once in a while, there are scenes of Bruce's facial expressions from Bruce's other films spliced in here and there. Interestingly enough, in the very beginning you can actually see an actual cut-and-paste job where the editors pasted Bruce Lee onto Kim Tai-Chung's form on the filmstock. Admittedly, it fooled me the first two times I saw this film back in middle school. Yeah, it's pretty bad, but wuddiagonnado? I mean, it's not like they had CGI to mask his face (like they did w/ the stunt double in Jet Li's *The One*)

Now the most important part about this film is the fight scenes. There are two choreographers: Bruce Lee and Sammo Hung. Bruce choreographed his own fight scenes, which include the stock footage at the beginning and the three major climatic duels. The first of these three has Bruce taking on Dan Inosanto (the man who taught Bruce Lee how to use the nunchaku if I'm not mistaken) with nunchaku (I bet you didn't see THAT one coming) and a bamboo cane. Next, Bruce takes on #5 from our Kill Bill list, using his usual moves plus a lot of the jujitsu that Bruce Lee had incorporated into his Jeet Kune Do style. Finally, the final duel is between Bruce Lee and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. These three fights make up one of the greatest climatic sequences ever filmed\*.

The non-Bruce Lee fight scenes are helmed by Sammo Hung (my favorite choreographer). Most people who are familiar with Asian cinema will know that Sammo Hung is THE greatest Bruce Lee impersonator in the business, which may come across as a surprise, as he weighs over 200 lbs. This title was earned through his work in *Enter the Fat Dragon* and *Skinny Tiger, Fatty Dragon*. Having done this film before the former, you can see the beginnings of his talent in that regard. However, he proceeds to make Kim Tai-Chung look quite good. While not as good as Bruce Lee, he kicks great and manages to do the Bruce Lee-isms without going overboard.

There are some comparisons that I must make in order to help me defend my position on this film. One of the points I wish to make is on the portrayal of Bruce Lee's character. Much like Steven Seagal, Bruce Lee tended to destroy all the bad guys that he fought in his films (setting aside the main villain). I remember my brother complaining that this film didn't make Bruce Lee out to be invincible. I'm glad for it. It's a nice change of pace. In all of the fight scenes, Billy Lo takes a couple of good hits. You know what? Excellent. It makes his character all the more human.

This leads me to my second point, which involves Sammo Hung and Robert Wall. Prior to this film, Sammo Hung had a cameo in *Enter the Dragon* as Bruce Lee's opponent at the very beginning. Robert Wall was in both that and *Return of the Dragon*. In neither of these two movies were those actors given much of a showcase. Bruce Lee destroyed both of them with the greatest of ease...except here. The greatest martial arts movies in my opinion are the ones that make the most of the talent involved. *Enter the Dragon* might've made it had Pat Johnson not done the choreography (the same applies to the *Mortal Kombat* films). As I said in the previous paragraph, Sammo Hung and Robert Wall were not well-showcased in their previous outings with Bruce Lee. That is remedied here. Wall is given two major fight scenes (one against Hung and one against Kim Tai-Chung), both of which show us that he actually knows martial arts (you wouldn't have guessed that from his role as O'Hara in *Enter the Dragon*). Hung also gets to show off some his fighting/acrobatic skills (in addition to his choreography talents) in his fight against Wall. Sure he's done far better, but it's better than what *Enter the Dragon* did for him.

Two of the men credited with the stuntwork are Bill Yuen and Mars. Mars is/was a regular from Jackie Chan's Hong Kong movies. Bill Yuen is better known as Yuen Biao, a long-time friend, collaborator, and co-student of Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung. In addition to the flips and somersaults that Yuen Biao does, he probably also did the two best moves of the movie. The first one is when Billy Lo does a back flip and kicks Robert Wall in the face. The second is the multiple "Chun Li" kicks that he performs in the same fight. That was the first time I ever saw those kicks, although it wouldn't be the last time. Donnie Yen has used those kicks in some of his movies, including the popular *Iron Monkey*, *High Voltage*, and his TV series *The Kung Fu Master*.

Now the film's influence extends to even into the 21st century. The yellow jumpsuit that Billy Lo dons in the film has become a Bruce Lee trademark. It was used in the "sequel" to this movie, *Tower of Death*. It was used in a few Bruce Lee imitation films, including *Dynamo*. It was worn by Jackie Cheung who starred alongside Jet Li in *High Risk*. In 2003, Uma Thurman donned the outfit for Quentin Tarantino's epic *Kill Bill Vol. 1*.

In addition to the costume, Jackie Chan's endearingly goofy *City Hunter* paid homage to this film. In it, there's a scene where Jackie takes on a pair of seven-foot tall black men in a cruise ship's theatre and ends up taking some hints from Bruce Lee's fight with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, which is playing in the background. Actually, that makes me wonder if this is the first movie to have a fight between the good guy and an opponent who stands two feet taller. Michelle Yeoh did in *Supercop 2* (the best fight of the movie). Yuen Biao also did it in *Don't Give a Damn*. Even in recent times, films like **Legendary Assassin** can trace their lineage back to this one through their David and Goliath fights.

This movie also has music provided by John Barry, a talented Hollywood composer. The music that accompanies the fight scenes is one of the most memorable and greatest themes of the genre. It really works in building up the suspense of the fight and conveying the emotion involved.

If you want CGI-fu, look somewhere else. If you want people flying around on wires looking pretty, this isn't your film. If you want a complex storyline involving a lot of well-developed characters, watch an arthouse film. If you want to see the best Bruce Lee fights, some good choreography from a young Sammo Hung, some good Bruce Lee impersonating, a young Sammo Hung in action, and an older Robert Wall in action, this is the film for you.

**Gang Master (Hong Kong, 1982: Tsui Siu-Ming)** - The Triad societies of today like to claim their lineage to the secret societies of Han Chinese that were formed after invasion by the Yuan from the North - patriots dedicated to overthrowing the barbarian invaders, governed by loyalty and honour. How exactly they think selling drugs and prostitutes in 21st Century Hong Kong is going to accomplish this I have no idea. Anyway, **GANG MASTER** is not about the Triads of today, but the original secret societies of yesteryear. It is quite unusual in that it does remind us of the connection to today's triads, showing how the kind of secret handshakes and ceremonies which we see today in films like *ELECTION* made much more sense in a time when the patriots needed to keep their identity a secret to avoid being purged by the government.

Austin Wai Tin-Chi plays a young martial arts master who is about to inherit the leadership of the Dragon Gang Triad society, until a letter is delivered by his own siblings which suggests he might really be a Mongol, and have killed to hide the truth. The seal on the letter is evidently credible enough to make the elders wary, and he is kicked out of the gang. He sets off to discover the truth about his own origins, and to prove his loyalty to the Han.

The plot is mostly transparent, but is enjoyable and does contain a few surprises and moments of genuine drama. The film is very well shot and directed. It's also quite action-packed, with some excellent choreography and performances. I hadn't paid Austin Wai Tin-Chi that much attention previously, but this film shows that he is a very talented martial artist/acrobat and a passable actor, though he doesn't have typically "leading man" looks or charisma. He certainly delivers in this role though.

There is a strong supporting cast too, with Ku Feng getting to do most of the serious acting, and talents like Bruce Leung and Yuen Tak delivering excellent martial arts. Yuen Cheung-Yan's action is inventive and impressive, mixing intricate kung fu forms with some elaborately staged "new-wave" sequences and wirework. The "secret handshakes" and rituals of the gang sometimes get quite ridiculous - in a good way.

The film doesn't have the best story, the best action or the best production values, but it scores highly in all of these categories. Definitely worth a watch.

**General Stone (Hong Kong, 1976: Hung Tao)** - Han Ying-Chieh directed the action in this one, or at least helped, along with Wong Gwok Chue. The film is apparently headed by one time director "Tao Hung."

Tan Tao Liang and Polly Kuan meet up, fight a little, get assaulted by some evil emperors (Lung Fei?) government, become friends, and go to some temple of rebels Polly Kuan belongs to in some way.. Here Tan Tao Liang finds out he is wanted by the government, because his Dad (who he has never known..) was "General Stone". After learning that his Dad is a statue next to "the temple", he goes to meet his Dad, where his Mom was apparently expecting him, and they're intercepted by the bad guys who take his Mom as a hostage. He falls into a well, or hole, or something, and lands in some underground lair. Here, Tan finally meets his Dad, along with a bunch of his "uncles" who are also stone men. His Dad gives him some magical bracers, and informs him that he has magical powers, he

goes through some uninspired boring training scenes (similar to 18 Bronzemen, but worse in every way!)..... Now he is a great fighter, with magical bracers and abilities, and he is off to aid the rebels and save his mother!-----

The story of the movie was bad, as was the acting. The magical elements were entertaining for unintended humor at first, but became pretty lame quickly. The statues (and some characters) disappear, reappear, jab people, and fall on top of them! Sometimes, they even become mobile (where they're actually portrayed by actors) where they partake in some very slow (fitting?, but not good!) and uninspired fighting! They seemed to do more damage with their unexpected jabs, and falling on top of their foes. The stone men also have some tiring monotone/robotic dubbing, that again is funny at first, but becomes annoying. The camerawork in the movie was pretty annoying and bad as well, but I'll touch on that more with the fights. The locations aren't impressive compared to other indies, and the sets are terrible.. Considering the obviously low budget, the costumes were decent.

Now on to the part that relates more to our April theme..

As I stated above, Han Ying-Chieh shared credit for the action with Wong Gwok Chue here.. Overall, I wasn't impressed. I was really trying to take notice on this aspect of the film for this review too... Nothing (for the most part) stood out as being particularly bad, or particularly good. Tan Tao Liang is close to wasted, and is capable of much better than he gets to show here. His best display of his kicking is during his training scenes, where he kicks some cheap, floating Halloween decorations (really bad looking skulls). Polly Kuan does look good at times though, and I could definitely see some similarities to Cheng Pei Pei in Come Drink With Me in Kuan's fighting. She wields two short blades, often fighting in spinning movements, and there is even a scene of her vs. multiple baddies in an inn! The finale is sub par, Lung Fei fights with a bow.. He apparently only brought one arrow which he shoots Polly with, then fights Dorian Tan, hand to bow.. This fight consists of Dorian Tan doing some less than stellar stuff as Lung Fei swings his huge bow in wide, wading motions.. Every now and then, he'd "spring" someone off of his bowstring, where a humorous "BOING" sound was used. Dorian Tan eventually uses his hereditary ability to turn to stone, and Lung Fei has nothing for him then!

There were some really poor calls in the camera work when it came to the action (and the movie in general.). I don't know who's job it is to manage this, director, action director, but whomever it was here was not very good. There was a lot of use of the "show character A strike, cut, show character B react" which I for one can't stand. If you are going to use this, you may as well not have actors capable of martial arts choreography.. But it gets worse, many times characters are cut off screen while fighting. I was watching a pan and scan, but that was clearly not the only contribution in this case. Worse yet (and obvious incompetence in whoever controlled the camera) were a few scenes that would show the backs of two extras (taking up no less than 3/4 of the screen), while the main characters fought in the background. My last gripe about the camera, there was some extremely annoying side to side scrolling during the fights to follow the action.. I really can't describe it, you just had to see it, but it just felt like your brain was not supposed to see it, haha!

With a poor plot, a low budget, silly magic stuff and some really poor camerawork, I was still entertained most the way through. I guess the decent fights and unintentional humor in saw me through it... Or maybe the fact that I was waiting to write this review? Either way, this is a bad movie, and not a good example of Han Ying Chieh's work, or anyone involved here for that matter. Polly Kuan looks decent at parts, and seeing her kick ass is one of the few reasons to watch this one. While I can't recommend this, and most likely will never watch it again, I've seen worse. Look's like it was me who took one for the team on this one

**Ghost Hill, The (Taiwan, 1971: Ting Shan-Hsi)** - The title Ghost Hill is quite misleading as it may give the impression that this will be a supernatural tale but it is a straightforward period sword fighting flick with close to non-stop action. The director is behind a few reasonably well-known films – Whiplash with Cheng Pei-pei, 800 Hundred Heroes with Brigitte Lin and the perhaps infamous A Queen's Ransom starring Angela Mao and George Lazenby - but Ghost Hill is a more enjoyable jaunt than any of those. There isn't much of a plot beyond revenge but Ding fills the screen with loads of thugs in bad haircuts, colorful costumes, eccentric weapons and imaginative action scenarios that make it a bit of a hoot.

It begins with a seeming dash of samurai influenced swordplay on the beach as two men duel for the privilege of being handed the Purple Light Magic Sword from an old master who is retiring from the business and looking for the right man to take on the title of Sword King. Even though Jun (David Tong-wai) wins the bloodless match, the old master gives the sword to Shadow Tsai (Tein Peng) and explains that Jun only won by using the secret Hidden Tiger Leaving Dragon sword move which is against the rules of good etiquette. This decision naturally doesn't sit too well with Jun.

Back home Shadow leaves the sword with his master only to return soon to find that the master has been killed and the sword stolen – he immediately suspects Jun. At the same time across town so to speak the long term nemesis of his family (for never explained reasons) Yun (Chan Bo-leung) and his daughter Swallow (Polly Shang-kwan) are also being attacked by a group of masked villains and the father is slain – and Swallow thinks that Shadow must be behind this. She calls her pal Jun over to help her out. What none of them realize initially is that the very evil King (Sit Hon) is behind both attacks and is trying to set these potentially formidable opponents against one another so that he can then rule the world and perhaps even move out of his spacious cave to a nicer neighborhood. He has a hottie of a daughter – Gia (Han Hsiang Chin) who is equally adept at poison, seduction and swordplay.

Eventually the good guys figure out who is responsible for all this trouble and they team up to invade his multilevel multi-cavernous cave with more booby traps than an Indiana Jones movie and this is when the film really takes off. There are some ten gates opposing our heroes and each one has its own obstacles to overcome such as ice, fire, explosions, poison and so on. With the help of the Beggar Gang who talk in sing-song syncopated rhymes they storm Hell's Castle and the body count makes D-Day look like a walk in the park. The action choreography is so-so – often looking too slow and on another occasion absurdly speeded up – but it's the set pieces in which the action is placed that makes it all rather silly fun.

**Ghostly Face, The (Taiwan, 1973: Yang Shih-Ching)** - There's something undeniably alluring about stumbling across obscure slices of kung fu cinema from the past, and *The Ghostly Face* could easily be categorized as one such example. In the 1970's the practice of Hong Kong and Taiwan filming (or in many cases co-producing) with their South East Asian neighbours was already a common one. Movies like the Angela Mao vehicle *The Tournament* and Chang Cheh's *Duel of Fists* both used Thailand as their backdrop, while productions such as the Chan Sing basher *The Awakened Punch* and Bruceploitationer *Bruce the Super Hero* utilised the Philippines.

Much less common though, was for crews to venture as far south as Indonesia. While today names like Iko Uwais and Yayan Ruhian have placed Indonesia firmly on the map for action cinema, 45 years ago that certainly wasn't the case. In fact, the only other example I can recall of Indonesia being featured as a backdrop for some 70's martial arts action is the rare Bobby Kim movie *Flying Tiger*. However even before then, perhaps the first example of a Taiwan-Indonesia co-production can be considered to be *The Ghostly Face*, a 1973 tale of vengeance based on a popular Indonesia comic book titled *Panji the Skull Face*. Much like the superheroes found in western comics, the heroic main character would be adapted several times over the years, appearing in another local production in the 1980's, and getting his own TV series in the 1990's.

However in this case, director Yang Shih-Ching decides to do the reverse of what Chang Cheh pulled in *Golden Swallow*, pushing the heroic title character to the sidelines, and instead making the main protagonist a vengeance filled daughter in the form of Polly Shang-Kuan. One of the most recognizable faces of the 70's Taiwanese kung fu cinema scene, Shang-Kuan is always a joy to watch, even when she's fighting giant lobsters (check out *The Zodiac Fighters*). After debuting in King Hu's seminal *Dragon Inn* in 1967, in the 6 years spanning 1973 – 1978, on top of starring in *The Ghostly Face* she'd headline another 40 kung fu flicks, displaying a work ethic few other femme fatales could match.

*The Ghostly Face* would be the last time she'd work with Shih-Ching, having collaborated previously on *The Grand Passion* (1970) and *A Girl Fighter* (1972), all of which also shared the common denominator of having the action choreographed by Poon Yiu-Kwan. With over 20 movies under his belt as action director by the time of *The Ghostly Face*, including King Hu's *A Touch of Zen*, it's easy to surmise that Yiu-Kwan was most at home choreographing the entertaining sword clangers that dominated the Taiwan movie scene in the 70's.

The biggest draw of *The Ghostly Face* though is the Bali location, which as far as I'm aware is the first and only time a martial arts movie has been filmed there (and a whole 8 years before the infamous *Mystics in Bali*!). The island of Bali has its own unique culture, and various aspects of it are featured throughout. While for some these travelogue sequences will likely be tiresome, credit has to be given for the way they're at least attempted to be integrated into the plot (has there ever been a kung-fu movie shot in Bangkok that doesn't feature pointlessly lingering shots of The Grand Palace and Democracy Monument!?). These dialogue free scenes include a funeral procession along the beach for Shang-Kuan's father, which contains the striking visual of her knelt down in the sand, as a towering funeral pyre burns to the ground, and later on a traditional Balinese play.

Shang-Kuan herself wears traditional Balinese attire, sporting a colourful sash and a flower adorned headband while she dishes out the pain to various bandits, which she does frequently. I've always loved the no-nonsense characters she usually plays, and here is no exception. When confronted by one bandit she asks him what he wants, to which he replies "I want to make love to you." Suddenly surrounded by a small army, the resulting melee sees several of



them end up with flower darts lodged in their eyes, one has his throat punctured by her fingers, before the original guy tries to escape, only to end up with his own sword lodged in his back. Indeed, this is not a girl to be messed with.

The plot itself involves Shang-Kuan seeking revenge on The Ghostly Mask, who she believes killed her father to steal his precious sword. It's hardly a spoiler to say that the actual killer wasn't the real Ghostly Mask, but it'd be no fun if she realised that straight away. The real man behind the mask is Indonesian actor Deddy Sutomo, a popular face of many 70's Indonesian movies, interestingly he's still active today. He can be found in The Raid 2, playing the floppy hat wearing official who persuades Iko Uwais to go undercover, which I never would have guessed. The Ghostly Mask itself definitely falls on the more curious side of heroic disguises. Essentially a mask that looks like a decomposing buck faced corpse, once seen it's not easily forgotten, and I daresay the vampire from Sammo Hung's Encounters of the Spooky Kind could well be a distant cousin.

Despite being the hero of the tale though, as previously mentioned, Shih-Ching gives him short thrift, with the real Ghostly Face not even making an appearance until 45 minutes in of a runtime that stretches just past 80. Thankfully though, when you have the burning intensity of an actress like Polly Shang-Kuan as your lead, this is entirely forgivable. The truth about The Ghostly Face is eventually revealed through her interactions with a villager, who she saves from a gang of pirates. It's another satisfying one versus many skirmish, which at one point has Shang-Kuan pin a pirates hand to the deck by driving a sword through it. It's worth noting that the villager is played by Indonesian actress Lenny Marlina, and not by Filipino actress (and Bruceploitation regular) Elizabeth Oropesa as stated in the Hong Kong Movie Database (who didn't make her debut until 1975).

Events eventually culminate in a finale that sees Shang-Kuan, Sutomo, and another mysterious actress who appears out of nowhere face off against the bad guys, played by Chan Wai-Lau and Chan Bo-Leung (no relation). The appearance of the other actress, who's only seen fleetingly in the opening scene, is likely indicative that somewhere in the depths of cinema obscurity, there could be a different Indonesian cut of The Ghostly Face, with more scenes of both the mystery actress and Sutomo. This practice was certainly common on many Hong Kong and Taiwan co-productions with Korea, with Don Wong Tao once recalling in an interview how, after the Chinese crew wrapped up filming, the Korean crew would stick around and film their own version with local actors. So it doesn't seem outside the realms of possibility for it to also be the case here.

It's an entertaining finish, made even more so by the revelation that perhaps Shang-Kuan's character isn't the sharpest tool in the box. Despite fighting another Ghostly Face imposter earlier on, inexplicably she still seems to believe Sutomo is her father's killer, so he spends half the fight battling against the real bad guys, while also having to defend himself from Shang-Kuan's fists and feet. In true old-school style though, the mystery actress declares in the middle of the brawl that Sutomo really is a good guy, which Shang-Kuan accepts no questions asked, leading to them finally teaming up to deliver violent retribution against the sword stealing crooks.

Half Bali travelogue, half Polly Shang-Kuan rampaging through hordes of human punching bags, The Ghostly Face may be far from perfect, but it's so brief that it's rarely anything other than entertaining. Fans of Shang-Kuan will find plenty to enjoy, and for the male population at least, it serves as a warning that if a woman asks what you want, be careful how you answer.

**Ghosts Galore (Hong Kong, 1983: Tyrone Hsu Hsia)** - Rascally rogues Lu Xing (Chin Siu Ho, future star of Mr. Vampire (1985)) and Fat Chicken (Chiang Kam) pose as Taoist priests to con a host of gullible folks out of their money but reckon without righteous sorcerer Lin Ching Yan (the great Lo Lieh). Later the boys bungle an exorcism incurring the playful wrath of a lovelorn lady ghost (Booi Yue-Fa). When Master Lin saves their lives with his spell-slinging skills, a chastened Lu Xing becomes his student although Fat Chicken opts out on learning he has to give up sex. Fat Chicken's frantic attempts to get laid result in a reunion with the ghost girl before an unfortunate turn of events. Meanwhile Lu Xing heroically rescues beautiful Junko (Yeung Jing-Jing), a Japanese ninja girl who renounced her evil clan and is now on the run from black magic master of disguise Okada (Lung Tien-Hsiang) and a samurai hit-squad terrorizing peasants across the land. To see justice done Lu Xing cajoles Master Lin into a supernatural showdown with an incredibly powerful Japanese magician (Korean Tae Kwon Do legend Hwang Jang-Lee).

Encounters of the Spooky Kind (1980) established Hong Kong cinema's most definitive brand of horror with the knockabout supernatural kung fu comedy and Sammo Hung as its foremost auteur. While Hung went on to produce, star or direct seminal genre films like the Mr. Vampire series and The Dead and the Deadly (1983) other great talents followed in his footsteps: Yuen Woo-Ping, Ann Hui, Ronny Yu, and Tsui Hark all dabbled extensively in the ghost-busting genre. Even chop-socky veteran Chang Cheh got in on the act with Attack of the Joyful Goddess (1983). The result was a golden age for Chinese supernatural shenanigans. Produced by Shaw Brothers, who were behind most of the best entries in the original gross-out cycle in HK horror where versatile Lo Lieh more often

played slimy bad guys (e.g. Black Magic Part 2: Revenge of the Zombies (1976), Human Skin Lanterns (1982)), Ghosts Galore ranks among the top tier kung fu ghost comedies.

Right from the opening credits, a surreal fusion of Kwaidan (1964) and The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) wherein Lin Ching Yan conjures tiny versions of Lu Xing and Fat Chicken out of a cup of tea to battle blue and purple sword-wielding demons, the film charms with its eccentric atmosphere. Hsu Hsia had earlier made The Kid from Kwangtung (1982) for the Shaw studio, a slapstick fu favourite lauded for its amazing action choreography. Here his intricate action scenes are no less fast-paced and furiously inventive pitting Chinese magic against Ninja trickery. Hsia makes fine use of the fight skills of Chin Siu Ho (who wields a cool multi-form weapon made of gold coins in a standout scene that plays like the kung fu version of Donald O'Connor's 'Make 'Em Laugh' routine in Singin' in the Rain (1952)) and lovely Yeung Jing-Jing (a gravity-defying battle where she spider-walks across the ceiling). The latter, who cracks skulls as deftly as she breaks hearts with her killer good looks, went on to be one of the top female fight choreographers in Hong Kong cinema. The slapstick humour is undeniably broad yet has an infectious energy. Hsia melds physical comedy with a lot of witty wordplay to turn traditional Chinese proverbs inside-out.

Ghosts Galore tells a deceptively familiar story: sagely sifu steers young rascal off the selfish path towards a more altruistic life. However, not only does the irreverent attitude keep the moral message from getting too preachy but on closer inspection the film is disarmingly subversive. Destiny is its central theme. While Lin Ching Yan believes destiny cannot be altered, Lu Xian refuses to stand idle in the face of an injustice. At first righteous Master Lin refuses to help Junko because she is Japanese. Scoffing at a sub-Confucian proverb ("You should only sweep away the snow at your own door and not bother about the frost on your neighbour's roof"), the reckless youngster reminds the wise elder of their duty to help those in need. The film grows more delirious with each plot twist, including a shock death and return from the grave ("Don't be sad, sometimes it's good to be a ghost"), reaching a psychedelic high point when laughing Lu Xian splits into multiple double-exposed duplicates to outfox an enemy and an amazing finale that attempts to outdo Encounters of the Spooky Kind. Here dueling master magicians pit paper cranes against a ghost army, supernatural flames against green water and paper dolls that become Chinese opera heroes before the cosmic arrival of Buddha himself (see also: A Chinese Tall Story (2005)) and the smiling, jarringly full-frontal nude little Peach Boy (see also: Child of Peach (1987)).

The film also has hints of eroticism as Booi Yue-Fa's comely ghost girl (naked beneath a transparent silk dress) saps the life-force from a not-entirely-unwilling scholar via mind-blowing supernatural sex, just like Joey Wong in A Chinese Ghost Story (1987), and a memorable scene where our horny heroes gawp at a paper ghost made of pornographic pictures. Especially engaging are the handmade special effects, pulled off in a mixture of traditional puppetry, ingenious editing, martial arts sleight of hand and other charming old school tricks. The result, like all the best HK fantasies of this era, is a colourful Asian comic book on screen.

**Girl Called Tigress, A (Taiwan, 1973: Wang Hung-Chan)** - The more I see of Polly Shang Kwan the more I like her. She has a certain cockiness to most of her characters that is very appealing – and has the physical skills to back it up. Of course the main problem in trying to track down her better films is the lack of information and of course titles showing up under various names. So for the most part when I go to one of those cheapy stores that sell the old kung-fu films I base my choices on two criteria. Is she prominently displayed on the cover and does the title hold some promise of action within. With a title like A Girl Called Tigress I knew that I could not go too far wrong – and I didn't.

Though the fighting is not fancy – almost all hand to hand combat with little use of weapons – it is very solid and there is a lot of it. Polly wanders into a town looking for her twin sister who had run off a few years previously. She sits down at an inn to munch on a few hot buns and four bullies try to get tough with her. They end up with the buns stuffed down their throat and themselves scattered about the inn. They go off for more help and about ten fellows come back to attack Polly. Pretty much the same result. So in the first ten minutes of the film, Polly has already had two fights and knocked quite a few heads together. It doesn't slow down much from there.

It turns out her identical twin sister is married to bad guy Yasuaki Kurata and he has no intention of letting the two sisters get together. Polly is joined by a detective – Kam Kang – who is trying to get proof on Kurata for some evil doings and the two of them have various run ins with Kurata's gang. Plenty of fighting to go around. The best being the final one between Polly and Kurata that goes on for a good ten minutes.

The pacing of the film is excellent – the three main characters are fleshed out – and wall to wall action – and Polly looked terrific. I don't ask for much more than that.

**Girl Fighter, A (Taiwan, 1972: Yeung Sai-hing)** - This is the fourth of these Union Film productions that I have watched starring Polly Shang-kwan but while she is at best a co-star in the others, in A Girl Fighter she is clearly the main focus and her often lead co-star Tien Peng is only around to support her. Like the others, the film has loads of

action (choreographed by Poon Yiu-kwan, co-credited for action in *A Touch of Zen*) but it also has a clear dramatic narrative that may have been mildly influenced by a classic Western (*Rio Bravo*).

It looks like a relaxing night for the Lio family of needlework and reading when a local bully breaks in with the intention of raping the wife. When the husband and family elders try to intervene they are killed and so is the wife. So much for a quiet evening at home. The killer is Kim Teng-jiao (Law Bun), a nasty brute whose father Zhang-peng is the big shot in the county with vast hoards of men at his bidding. And no one messes with his boy if he wants to stay healthy. When the authorities advertise for someone to help them capture Teng-jiao they get no takers until a diminutive figure shows up to offer assistance. The authorities look askance at one another because Sima Mu-rong is not only small but also of the female gender. But she soon shows them her fighting skills by taking on four guards and embarrassing them. She gets the job. No resume required.

Like most spoiled bullies, Teng-jiao is taking up space at the local brothel, The Spring Whorehouse. After killing a few of his drinking buddies and smacking him up more than a little, Sima takes her man to the local jail to await transportation for trial. This is the real meat of the story as Sima and six guards attempt to take Teng-jiao across hostile territory with dangers everywhere as the father has every intention of getting his son back. Sima gets some surprising assistance from Geng (Tien Peng) who is related to the Lio's and also from Captain Dong (played by Miao Tien with his usual stern authoritative presence). Numerous fights occur and the small band of brave men and one woman who refuse to give in slowly dwindle one by one.

It is always enjoyable coming upon actors like Miao Tien (a.k.a. Miu Tin) in these old films. He had quite the lengthy career and filmography stretching from King Hu's *Dragon Gate Inn* and *A Touch of Zen* until he became a favorite of Taiwanese new wave director Tsai Ming-liang who used him in a bunch of his films - *Rebels of the Neon God*, *The River*, *The Hole*, *What Time is it There* and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (in which he watched himself on screen as a much younger man). He died in 2005 at the age of 80.

**Godfather Squad, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Ng See-Yuen) – aka Little Godfather from Hong Kong** - Martial Arts movie star Wong Liu (Leung Siu-Leung) saves a man from being assassinated in Hong Kong. This brings the wrath of the Carlo crime family down on him. They covertly ask him to appear in a movie in Rome, but they have no intentions of making a movie. When the gangsters kill Wang Liu's uncle, he takes matter into his own hands unleashing his lethal legs and furious fists on the Italian crime lord.

"I'll have that Chinese punk's head on a plate"- Don Carlo.

*Little Godfather From Hong Kong* is filled with many old school Hong Kong movie tropes. At the same time it manages to set itself apart from a lot of the Martial Arts movies that were churned out at the same time. This is mainly thanks to Italian influence with this being a co-production shot mainly in Rome. With a cast made up of mostly international actors. The late American bodybuilder Gordon Mitchell (*Tiger From River Kwai*) who appeared in countless Italian productions, appears here as one of the Crime bosses son's. Japanese actor and Martial Artist Yusuaki Kurata plays one of Don Carlo's adoptive son's too, who has a pretty minor role until the last half hour of the movie.

Ng Se-Yuen (*The Bloody Fists*) who scripted and directed this production also discovered its Hong Kong born star Leung Siu Lung. According to an interview Leung did with Bey Logan on H.KCinemagic, it was Ng who discovered him whilst he was brawling in the street. At the age of 24 this was only his second starring role despite being a stuntman from the age of fifteen. He would never rise to the same amount of fame as some of the other H.K actors from the era. Yet he remains one of the most skilled Martial Artists to ever grace the big screen. Judging by some of his off-screen antics he was also a stand up guy who wasn't shy about fighting anyone off screen, just like his movie persona's.

The fight scenes staged by Leung Siu-Lung are a great showcase for his Martial Arts prowess. Apart from the final showdown all of the fight scenes feature foreign mainly Italian stuntmen. This as you can imagine has a big impact on the quality of the action and what Siu-Lung could stage. Not that the stuntmen were incapable they had simply been trained in a different style of film combat. The fight scenes would certainly have been improved a lot had they brought more H.K talent over to Rome. That said I still found the movies action to be very entertaining and we are treated to some amazing locations for it. In the brief footage filmed in H.K there's also an impressive stunt involving Siu-Lung hanging onto the open door of a speeding car. There's not much in the way of Martial Arts in the first twenty or so minutes. Yet things do start to pick up with Wong Liu dodging various assassination attempts. Even some photo happy tourists are not what they appear and give Wong an explosive camera. Lucky for him he has Heidi (Shirley Corrigan) to alert him of the danger.

While the some of the stuntmen are a bit on the slow side, it's still entertaining to see Leung Siu-Lung chop them down with his fantastic boot work. This looks more impressive because there is clearly a big height difference, with most of the Italian crew being taller than the movies hero. In one scene he results to using a sub machine gun against a foe in the only time Ive seen him brandishing a gun. The fights are too well staged to be referred to as bashers. Yet the Italian stuntmen's fighting does lean a bit towards the basher style. However Leung's performance is too crisp and stylish to place it entirely in that category. The same can also be said of his main foe in the picture. Yusuaki Kurata as always is a pleasure to watch and here he's no exception, despite his lack of screen time. Apart from an early demonstration featuring the only other Asian actors including Tony Leung Siu-Hung & Lam Hak Ming in masks. Kurata does nothing until the end of the movie.

Which brings me onto the real show stopper the one on one finale between Sakada(Kurata) and Wang Liu. It's a superb tour de force of Rome as they take in multiple locations during their encounter. Kurata is on top form in this one and gets to display some really nice kicks. According to Siu-Lung, Yusuaki Kurata practiced Japanese Hapkido but he did learn some kicking techniques from Lung too. That explains why the finale features a superb kick fest and the fact it was made in 1974 makes it more impressive. Sure, I wouldn't say this is in the top ten best Asian fight scenes, maybe not even top twenty but it's a real impressive display of human ability and fitness. This fight is a good example of a choreography that leans in both the shapes and basher approaches to movie combat. The fight is somewhat shorter than Kurata encounters with Chan Sing in *Rage Of The Wind* and *Kung Fu The Invisible Fist*. However this still might be overly long for some Martial Arts movie fans. You can tell that most of the fight scenes were filmed on the fly as passerby stand to watch. With some of the moves on display it's easy to see why people would stand and stare. That said I don't think think two Asian actors appearing to try and kill each other is a common site in the Italian capital.

Nice to see Mang Hoi among the cast in an early role, sadly he doesn't get to showcase too much of his physical talents. His character also suffers from sounding like he's been dubbed by a woman trying to do the voice of a young boy. The film features little intentional comedy but there is some unintentional funny moments. Such as the exploding dog that Siu-Lung stops from killing a man. Yes you read that right an exploding dog. It seems the Carlo crime family have a thing for putting explosive where you wouldn't expect them. Thankfully they haven't used a real animal for this sequence. The Carlo crime family are an odd bunch with the three brothers appearing to be from different countries. There's Gordon Mitchell's Nazi hat wearing nutter who appears to be at least as old as his father. Not sure how that works out? maybe the English dub job made a mess of the original script?. Then there's his Japanese half brother who we have already mentioned. Mario Cutini appears to playing the crime boss's only legitimate son as he is Italian. What's even odder is that they all represent countries that were allies at one point in the second world war. Where the film makers trying to make some kind of statement perhaps?, probably not.

Special mention should go to Gordon Mitchell's who's character nearly steals the show, despite him not being a classically trained actor. There's certainly some nods to the kind of role Klaus Kinski was doing around the same time. Despite him not being all that young at the time of the production he does a decent job. His fight with the films hero is not bad at all when you consider he wasn't schooled in the Hong Kong style of movie making. Italian actress's Shirley Carrigan and Maria D'Incoronato are the only female members of the cast. Carrigan gets to do more than her fellow actress but like a few of the casts members acting is not there strong point. Veteran European actor Consalvo Dell'Arti(*Return Of Shanghai Joe*) puts on a decent performance as head of the Carlo crime family. I'm not sure how he managed to keep his face straight throughout the entire hour and a half run time.

*The Little Godfather From Hong Kong* is a pretty average but still a very entertaining Eternal Film.Co movie. There's some great Martial Arts talent on display and If you are fan of Leung Siu Lung then its certainly worth seeking out. Just don't expect this to be an absolute knock out movie. The plot is a bit different but its thinner than a needles tip and there's plenty of random moments and dialogue thrown in too. For some this might be a good thing, to others it might be a warning sign.

**Gold Hunters (Hong Kong, 1981: Fung Hak-On)** - Kung fu comedy produced by Jackie Chan starring Lau Ga Yung, Lee Hoi San, and a guy I've never heard of before, Mang Chui. They are thieves, and as you can guess, they are after some gold, and spend the whole movie searching for it. It moves along at a decent pace, has some good comedy, and the story is interesting enough so that you won't have trouble staying awake waiting for the next fight. The 3 leads give good performances, even this Mang Chui guy is competent performing the shapes choreography. And it's nice to see Lee Hoi San in a comedic lead role where he actually gets to show his fighting skills, unlike *Fist and Guts*.

This is not one of the most fight filled movies you will ever see, but to me there was plenty of fighting (around 20 minutes). Melvin Wong, Chu Tiet Wo, Wilson Tong and the 3 leads all get to properly display their skills. Fung Hak

On's character reminds me of the role he played in *Legend of a Fighter*, which made me think he was just going to have a goofy fight or 2, but it was a nice surprise to see him tear up the screen in the final fight. Easily one of the best fights of his career.

**Golden Dart Hero (People's Republic of China, 1987: Li Wenhua)** - This was one of two kung fu movies from the Chinese Mainland that was available for rent at my local Blockbuster Video back in the day. The other one was *The Undaunted Wu Dang*, which I rented multiple times. I never picked this one up for some reason and now that I've seen it, I'm sorta glad I didn't. Watching it for the first time as a (slightly) more mature movie geek, I can appreciate the film more for its intriguing moral ambiguities, which I wouldn't have noticed before and probably wouldn't have bothered with watching it again years later. This is easily one of the best Mainland chopsockey movies out there, not just for its pleasing wushu-based fights, but for its complex character arc.

Wang Qun (who played Wong Fei Hung in the QUATIC clone **Fist from Shaolin**) plays Golden Dart, a member of a notorious band of robbers known as The Four Bandits. When we meet him, he's riding along the countryside in a failed attempt to save one of his big brothers from execution at the hands of the local Qing magistrate Shi. He hacks up a crapload of Qing soldiers with his trusty broadsword before making a run for it. Some days later, he goes into town and makes an attempt on the Magistrate's life. He's interrupted by the arrival of a second assassin, the daughter of the leader of the Phoenix Hill Robber Band, who mistakens him for one of the magistrates flunkies. They have this big fight before they figure out that they're on each other's side and start slashing the crap out of the Qing soldiers.

Golden Dart then goes to see his dying father, a former kung fu master who has served the government for most of his life. He asks Golden Dart to mend his criminal ways and become a law-abiding citizen like he had been. Golden Dart, being a filial son, heeds his father's wishes and takes up on the rather gracious magistrate's offer for him to become a Deputy. This puts him at odds with the Phoenix Hill band, especially now that the daughter of the Phoenix Hill gang boss has fallen in love with him. He's eventually stripped of his post because of the machinations of a rival magistrate. In any other movie, this might be the moment where he rejoins his gang and becomes an anti-Qing activist. But the film doesn't take the easy way out. He's dedicated to living up to his father's last wish, and when the honest Magistrate Shi is kidnapped by the Four Bandits gang, Golden Dart will have to choose between filial piety and his surrogate robber Family...

There is a Strong moral complexity to Golden Dart's plight here, especially if one understands Chinese culture. After all, being obedient and faithful to one's parents is an important part of Chinese relationships. But on the other hand, "sworn brotherhood" is also nothing that one should take lightly, especially among Oriental peoples. So what happens when the two ultimately fall into conflict? And those Waters are further muddled by the moral stance of the two sides that Golden Dart has to choose from. After all, if the Four Bandits were pro-Ming rebels, one might argue that Golden Dart owed more to his people than to just his Family. But that's not the case, here. They are bandits and criminals, nothing more. On the same token, Golden Dart \*is\* working for the Qings, who oppressed the Han Chinese people more than 250 years. Under that definition, Golden Dart's father would be a turncoat. Then again, at the very least, the Magistrate who takes him under his wing is an anomaly: a Qing leader who actually cares about the people he serves. So there is no easy way out in the conflict presented here, and the film is stronger for it.

There's also the Always-dependable wushu-based action, which dominates the first and last acts of the movies. No comedic bouts and mugging at the camera here. The entire cast is made up of wushu students, and it shows. Wang Qun's is far less ornate than what we've seen from the likes of Wu Jing, Vincent Zhao Wen-Zhuo and Jet Li. It's directness and simplicity reminds me a lot of the fights in *Black Belt* and *Enter the Dragon*, as Wang frequently downs people with a single reverse punch or take down. But he does take some time to show off some nice, flashy aerial kicks just to brighten things up. There is also a lot of weapons work, as the combatants fight with sabers, two-edged swords (one of the main actresses wields a mean two-fisted sword), spears, three-section staves, and even umbrellas. One character even gets to fight (briefly) with melon hammers, although his fights with those are a bit too brief. The fights don't quite match intensity of the best Mainland kung fu movies, like *Martial Arts of Shaolin* and *Holy Robe of Shaolin*, but they're still satisfying and plentiful.

**Golden Destroyers (Hong Kong, 1985: Gordon Chan)** - I have no idea if this is the same Gordon Chan who would later go on to direct such modern-day hits as *Fist of Legend*, but I sure hope it is! This may very well be the best

worst kungfu film I have ever witnessed. There is really nothing good about anything in this film. The plot is utterly absurd. The acting is on par with a fourth grade school play. The costumes look like they were made for \$5 out of cotton balls and the curtains someone found in the garbage. The kungfu is so completely powerful that men are knocked down by blows that land a good four inches away from them.

So with so much going against it, it's no wonder I love this horrid little film. So dig this: some vacationing cops are wandering around in the woods of Thailand when they notice a monk raising the corpses of the fabled 18 Shaolin Bronze Men. Witnessing this moves one of the cops to say, "Raising the dead. Hmmm...might be a scientific breakthrough."

Turns out the priest guy is working for some smack dealers operating out of the Golden Triangle, and they are going to use the Bronze Men to smuggle heroin! Yes, because nothing is less suspicious than a half-naked man made of bronze stumbling through an airport refusing to show you his carry-on luggage.

The cops swing their arms at the bad guys while the Bronze Men stomp around the Thai countryside, stopping from time to time to terrorize a village or two, which causes one little girl to ask, "Who are those men? And why are they made of gold?" Somewhere, some guy with white eyebrows pasted to his face (because he is wise) comes into play.

This movie is just awful in all the best ways, and I laughed and enjoyed myself the whole way through. It certainly packs plenty of entertainment value punch despite its eight million short comings. If you're the drinking type, beer may be in order for this one. You should definitely have a group of kungfu fan friends over. Viewing this movie alone could be hazardous to your health and result in choking.

**Golden Knight (Hong Kong, 1970: Griffin Yueh)** - Lily Ho is master of Poison Palm, one of 6 Excellent Skills and is looking for killer of her father. There is mysterious assassin around who is looking for kung fu manuals and also knows poison palm and shadow of blame falls to Lily. Eventually she falls into hands of her accusators but with help she manages to escape and mission to find real killer starts....There is more than that in storyline which is extremely finely crafted...

Cast is excellent with solid performance by Lily and rest of crew too. Rare appearance of Wong Hap as good guy..2 very tiny things, one is here is again concept female is dressed as a man. With hat on with imagination would perhaps barely want to believe she can act as a male. But with hair visible even blind would see it's female as mans dress...

Other might be something gone wrong in english translation when eventually lily reaches masked one, she tells is the person who killer has been impersonating but that causes no reaction.

I remember watched this 1st time from dvd-r maybe 7 years ago and liked it really. Few years ago found ivl disc from amazon.com and one milestone was reached then. Held back too long for revisit, this is true "forgotten" classic in Shaw oldies swordplay cinema. Plot is one of the best(there is still few I have not taken off from seals but likely they do not top this in story), sets are good and so is action.

Fantastic movie, if one likes old wu xia flicks this is one not to be missed.

**Golden Lion, The (Hong Kong, 1975: Ho Meng-Hua)** - Honorable thief Golden Lion (Chiu Hung) is poisoned by Wang Jian Chao's (Wang Hsieh) dangerous claw weapon and seeks help with Dr. Lu (Fang Mian) and his daughter (Li Ching). In need of an ingredient only found at a mountain far away, the journey begins with Lu's son (James Nam) expresses concern about his father's reputation helping a thief and Wang's gang hot on the heels of the fellowship...

At 83 minutes and simple enough content, Ho Meng-Hua (Black Magic) wastes no time (and I mean NO time) getting us into the action and setting up Chiao Hung's morals. It makes sense because the 83 minutes aren't about making any statements but are just there to provide a slick ride broken up with intense action not skipping on the gore, grit or the animalistic nature to it. The Golden Lion is a bit of a poster boy for Shaw Brothers efficiency and an experience audiences can turn to for a quick fix in the best of ways.

**Golden Mask (Taiwan, 1977: Ting Chung) aka Golden Killah** - A hardened assassin gets caught up in a deadly web of intrigue and deceit.

This is one movie I went into where I had not read any reviews on it first, it just looked interesting from the cover and by who stars in it. Now that I just finished watching it, I can say that I'm glad I decided to check it out despite not knowing what I was in for.

As you can tell from the cover, and maybe the title, this movie features an unknown villain that wears a 'Golden Mask' (which is actually the original title for the movie). So as you might have already guessed, because this villain is virtually unknown to us, the viewer, this makes for a great suspenseful, "whodunit" type of movie. I have to admit after watching a few of director Lee Tso Nam movies such as *The Green Jade Statuette*, *The Hot The Cool* and the *Vicious*, and *Eagle's Claw*, I really do enjoy these types of plot lines. The director of this movie is Ting Chung, so I guess I will have to check out other movies he has directed. The reason this type of "whodunit" storytelling is so appealing to me, is because it really keeps you on your toes and makes you want to finish watching the film just to see the outcome, and this movie definitely had me in such a position, some great plot twist at the end. The action in this movie is hard to call, I don't know if I would say it is average or slightly above average, but I do know the action in this film was a bit more uptempo than what I seen in the recently reviewed, *Slice of Death* movie. The only thing that hurt the overall enjoyment in watching this flick, was the close-up shooting during the fight scenes, it really made it difficult to fully appreciate the choreography of the fight scenes. Just for the story alone, I would have to recommend watching this movie. An enjoyable viewing experience that falls in between an average and above average film.

The action in this movie was good, but could of been better if not for the camera close-ups during the fight scenes. This really made it difficult to understand and appreciate the choreography. During the first half of the movie, there were 3 fights back to back to back, while brief fights, you can really get a taste of what's to come later on in the film. The final fight scene involved these cymbal-with-blades type weapons that were thrown like a flying guillotine (as seen on cover). These were a nice surprise, and had me wishing they were used at other points in the film, but still, a nice way to add another element of surprise to the movie, because I surely wasn't expecting to see them. Overall, some fairly decent action in an above average plot twisting movie.

The only blood I recall seeing in this film was during one of the end fight scenes, that infamous 'internal bleeding' mouth shot. Other than that earlier on a guy takes a bamboo stick through the chest, and a couple body gashes by sword. An overall clean, DNA free movie.

While many of the stars had some reasonably sufficient fight scenes, and also while Doris Lung looked cute as ever, the standout performance of this film was by the person that wrote the script. Very good job, take a bow, whomever you are.

**Golden Sabre, The (Taiwan, 1969: Hou Cheng)** - Wong Yung wins a kind of challenge organised by an old master's apprentice who makes swords and he becomes friend with him. Later, while he is in his master's house, he is defeated by Au Wei and he leaves the house and his lover (Tien Ni) who discovers that her father died.

Wong Yung then becomes friend with a clan of beggars and they rob people, but when some of the beggars try to rape a young girl after killing her father, Wong Yung saves her and she decides to stay with him and serve him. Later, Wong Yung return to the old master who makes swords and this one gives him a golden sabre, before killing himself and Wong Yung goes to fight with Au Wei with his golden sabre. A good movie with an interesting plot, even if I'm not able to describe the story with precision because of the lack of subtitles, and the fights are good. Worth watching.

**Golden Swallow (Hong Kong, 1968: Chang Cheh)** - aka **Girl with the Thunderbolt Kick** - Reading the other day that Cheng Pei Pei was going to star in the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* along with Chow Yun Fat and Michelle Yeoh, gave me an irresistible urge to finally watch this Shaw Brothers classic. It is a sequel to another classic film – *King Hu's Come Drink with Me* – but this one was directed Chang Cheh – the legendary kung fu director.

Cheng Pei Pei again stars as the heroic character Golden Swallow who uses her two-sword method of killing to fight evil in ancient China. In this film though Jimmy Wang Yu joins her and the death count escalates dramatically. Wang Yu was coming off his huge box office hit – *The One Armed Swordsman* – and this really becomes much more his film than Cheng Pei Pei's.

Wang Yu stars as Silver Roc – dressed elegantly in white and silver - who cuts a swathe of death across the countryside - always leaving a golden dart behind at each scene to implicate Golden Swallow. I am not talking about a killing here or there either – this is sometimes wholesale slaughter in which Roc shows absolutely no mercy. In the

aftermath of one scene the camera pulls back to reveal a mass of dead bodies covering nearly every inch of the floor. These victims though are all bad guys – most of them belonging to a gang called the Golden Dragon Gang.

The reason that Silver Roc is attempting to implicate Golden Swallow is because of love. It turns out that both of them were trained together in the martial arts – but Silver Roc disappeared suddenly after avenging his murdered family. Many years later he still loves Golden Swallow and this is his method of getting her attention. Whatever happened to flowers and chocolates? Wang Yu does a nice job of portraying this tortured nihilistic soul who carries around with him bitter memories of his youth and his feelings for Golden Swallow that only drink and the company of easy women can ease.

In the meantime, Golden Swallow was nearly killed at the beginning of the film and saved and nursed back to health by Han Tao. She has since become attached to him and his friend played I think by a young Wu Ma – but she still has strong feelings for Silver Roc. Han Tao is clearly in love with her and they both go off separately to find Roc. Much more killing takes place – Cheng Pei Pei – getting involved as well – but this is all leading to a showdown between the two men over Golden Swallow.

Though this film doesn't have the weight and wonderful textured feel of Hu's Come Drink with Me it is still a terrific adventure film with three well drawn characters and a huge amount of action. Wang Yu never impresses me in his kung fu films, but I find him quite acceptable in his swordfighting roles. The swordfighting style is clearly influenced by the Japanese Chambara films – nearly all rapid no motion wasted killing (though much less blood spurting going on) – with no lengthy one on one fights (until the duel).

Much more of Cheng Pei Pei's character is revealed here than in Come Drink as she displays both the soft and the killing sides to Golden Swallow. The American title – Girl with the Thunderbolt Kick – is a complete misnomer because Golden Swallow never utilizes martial arts – relying totally on her two-sword technique to do her killing. Cheng Pei Pei was in fact a dancer and not trained in the skills of martial arts – but she looks very lithe and graceful with a sword and can take on such a hard cruel look when she is fighting. Cheng Pei Pei was really the first great action heroine in HK films and though I don't expect she will be doing any fighting in Crouching Tiger – this being filmed some 30-years after her Golden Swallow days – I still look forward to seeing her.

**Golden Swallow (Hong Kong, 1968: Chang Cheh)** - Chang Cheh directs a sequel to a King Hu film? Yeah, that's a weird idea...Cheng Pei-pei, who played the female lead of COME DRINK WITH ME, and the title character of this film, is completely snubbed over in favour of Jimmy Wang Yu, and to a lesser extent Lo Lieh, and to a lesser extent Wu Ma, and to a lesser extent Mars...

This is a stunning looking film, with extensive location work and gorgeous colour photography. For all its flaws with how it handles Golden Swallow, that's only in comparison to its predecessor. On its own merits, this is a powerful tale of madness and obsession - Jimmy Wang Yu isn't very convincing as a pining lover, but makes a great sociopath.

A very good film, and be warned, the scene with Mars is bleak...

**Golden Sword, The (Hong Kong, 1969: Lo Wei)** - In 1969 director Lo Wei and Cheng Pei-pei teamed up for three wuxia films – the other two being “Dragon Swamp” and “Raw Courage” - in a collaboration that began during their years at Shaw and continued after both left the studio (“Shadow Whip” and “Kung Fu Girl”). Compared to the two other films, “The Golden Sword” is a bit lackluster with a narrative that feels like a bent edge. Most of the first half of the film seems to have little in common with the final half – they are the same characters but it leads you down one road and then suddenly shifts the nature of the film and it doesn't really hang together that well. At the same time there are a number of individual scenes that are nicely done, but it almost seems like two scripts roughly sewn into one cloth. Cheng Pei-pei has a few solid scenes – she gets a terrific song and dance number and a few enjoyable action sequences, but also disappears for stretches with the focus swinging to her wan male co-star.

As Snoopy might write, one dark and rainy night two mysteriously hooded figures appear at the home of kung fu master Bai Chun-tung (Lo Wei) and demand that he accompanies them. Without hesitation, he joins the pair and they all disappear into the night – and Bai vanishes for years. Seven years later his now grown son, Bai Yu-long (Kao Yuen) begins to look for his father in the territories outside of the rule of law. On his long journey one day he passes a dirty vagrant walking in a snowstorm on the road and offers a ride to the nearest town but is turned down. Later this same vagrant shows up at the inn and Bai again offers his help and asks the person to share his warm bed.



What Bai doesn't know – but we the much smarter audience do – is that this vagrant is in fact a woman – played by of course Cheng Pei-pei – and this causes some mild humor as Ngai does her best not to end up in bed with him.

Soon he discovers that not only is she a female but one with astonishing kung fu powers. This occurs when she meddles in the middle of a fight and is able to catch three knives flung at her – one in her mouth. The two of them take on an inn full of hooligans and Ngai announces that she will kill the Three Cripples in ten moves. Ten movies later she is on her way back to the camp of beggars – an assortment of Robin Hood types who steal from the wealthy to feed the poor – and when they are not stealing and fighting they love a good old hootenanny. Bai is so taken with her singing and kung fu that he invites her on his quest and the two of them wander the country for over a year. Then suddenly they are married. End of part one of the film.

The second section of the film is much more what one expects from a Lo Wei film with its use of strong females, hidden identities, face masks, confusing turns and a secret fortress – all pop elements he uses in both his Bond like films as well as his martial arts ones. On the day after the marriage the figures in the hoods appear again and demand that Bai come with them – but he refuses and in the ensuing fight these figures prove to have martial arts ability much beyond that of Bai and Ngai and he is captured and taken away to the Dragon Palace.

The Dragon Palace is ruled by women – the chief (Wang Lai) and her Second in Command (Go Bo Shu) show little mercy towards the male species and keep them enslaved and chained up (and since there are young members of the Dragon Palace, the men are possibly used for other purposes!). If they attempt to escape they are thrown into a pit of snakes or shown a video of the Greatest Speeches of George Bush. Bai is brought here but for a different purpose – one that brings him face to face again with his long lost father and maybe his mother. Appearing also are Ku Feng as one of the Three Cripples, Yeung Chi Hung as the major-domo of the Bai residence and you can spot Sammo as one of the minions at the inn. Lo Wei often has a lot of good ideas in his films, but he often stumbles in the execution with his poor pacing and that is the case here to some extent. Still, any Cheng Pei-pei is better than no Cheng Pei-pei!

**Golden Triangle, The (Hong Kong/Thailand, 1975: Wu Ma & Rome Bunnag)** - Shot in Hong Kong and Thailand, it's opium wars reigning with those growing the crop trying to make a living and not have it end up in the hands of drug smugglers. Lo Lieh plays one such hired by Tien Feng's gang to acquire the latest opium batch that is guarded by Tanny Tien's character. A possible undercover cop exists in one of the camps too. Strung together in the dulllest of ways, endless scenery shots, stiff action and lack of at least decent pace sinks the only mild ambitions The Golden Triangle seemed to have anyway. Tien Feng is stereotypical evil and Lo Lieh the cool drug smuggler but those favourite performers can only provide mild, very sporadic spark. One shootout at the end redeems Lo Lieh a little though.

**Goose Boxer (Hong Kong, 1979: Chin Ming)** - The *Fearless Hyena* influence is still felt with *Goose Boxer* which was released later that year in 1979. You have a comedic martial art movie with a made up style and masochistic training scenes. There is a somewhat different twist where the student is really not a willing one under the *sifu* (though Jackie Chan was not always that willing under his *sifu*'s either.)

My goodness the comedy is bad here. The movie gets better when more focus is on the crane, goose and sex style martial arts, especially the last two fights. I'm a Lee Hoi-sang fan so I will watch anything he is in and I like best the fight with him versus Phillip Ko. I probably should not be rooting for him against Charles Heung in the finale though – ungrateful forced student. Some of this film reminds me of *Knockabout* which also came out earlier than this and is probably an influence.

Addy Sung Gam-loi's eyebrows should have a credit of their own as they seem to have a life of their own.

Whenever I go over a 1970s martial art film I then look it up in Dr. Reid's *The Ultimate Guide to Martial Arts Movies of the 1970s*. While it is missing a decent amount of Golden Harvest capsule reviews it is still normally a great resource, especially in dealing with the martial art aspect of the film. The reviews are rarely film criticism. Now he hates this film, mainly because of the use of the "little person." Unfortunately he gets plot aspects of the movie quite wrong and does not even mention the sex manual which is a big part of the plot. This leads me to wonder if he paid attention to the film, not counting that he timed all the training and fight scenes (a big plus with this book.) HKMDB has the wrong year for this movie as well. I had to go to HKFA to get the proper release date.

What do you think of the use of the "small person" in the film? Is this a sore spot in the film? Now you probably did not need the biting of the groin in the film (or do you), but Charles Heung probably did not need the poop in the face either. Maybe he did, but I did not need to see it.

**Grandmaster of Death (Hong Kong, 1976: Chang Cheh) – New Shaolin Boxers** - Rather excellent Shaw Brothers film from Chang Cheh, which ditches the homosexual subtext and male bonding and stuff for a compelling story about people who are too afraid to stand for something and the individual who decides to stop standing on the sidelines and do something. Alexander Fu Sheng gives in one of the best fighting performances I've seen from him so far. The movie features some of the best choreography for a Shaw Bros film outside of a Lau Kar-Leung masterpiece. I could've gone without the rape sequence (although the circumstances that lead to it really drive the theme home) and the excess of training application shots during the final fight, but this is a very good movie.

**Grandmaster of Shaolin Kung Fu (South Korea, 1978: Lee Hyeok-Su) - Mantis Boxer; The Divine Martial Arts of Dharma** - A gem is needed in order to access the Golden Buddha, one man has it and all the other kung fu fighters around want it. The person possessing this jewel can obtain the Book of Secret Fighting. The most skilled fighter already has it and hopes to learn from the Book of Secret Fighting in order to advance his skills and to eventually take revenge on the man that killed his parents when he was a child.

This movie features elements that truly makes it stand out from other mediocre average kung fu movies, such as cheesy special effects, supernatural kung fu abilities, and over the top english dubbing. This story is as easy to follow as the action, meaning there is not too many complex moves displayed at all, couple of fights are somewhat slow while others are of above average speed. For the price that I paid for this movie, there really is nothing I can complain about, I at least got my money's worth.

The only thing that was funny in this movie were a couple of the characters dubbed voices. The Master whom teaches the young man from the Book of Secret Fighting sounded just like Sean Connery (as heard in [audclip\\_01](#)). Others had very distinct voices along the lines of Carter Wong's character in Born Invincible, but sadly these characters were only in the movie for 1 scene (as heard in [audclip\\_03](#)). Other than that, no comedy to report on.

The action was average at best, some slow fights and some a bit faster due to sped up frame rate maybe? The action in this movie accounts for about 1/3 of its total length. Overall the kung fu in this movie was fairly decent while displaying nothing new or stuff you haven't seen before .. except maybe one scene that might make you think of Star Wars ..."use the force Luke" ... (as seen in [vidclip\\_02](#)). The end fight scene between the "hero" and "villain" was very disappointing, there were Gold Statue Men that had came to life and instead of putting up a good fight against the "hero" it looked more like a choreographed dance routine. When they did start to fight they were very weak in show. The "villain" vs. the "hero" was almost as bad, first off he's not a very menacing looking man, not saying the main villain has to be but still .... at one point during their fight he takes off running .. lol. There was some cool moves being made but as a whole, not the best. Just check out [vidclip\\_06](#) to see what I'm talking about.

The standout performance in this film, well ... I would have to say is the director, Godfrey Ho. Who seems to have this mediocre kung fu film making down to a tee. His films are not considered the best the kung fu movie genre has to offer, but at the same time his films never cease to entertain me. Godfrey's Named Be Praised!

Buy. Why? .... cause it's cheap, and there is enough entertainment value in this movie to get your moneys worth.

**Great Conspiracy (Taiwan, 1980: Pao Hsueh-Li) – aka Mask of Vengeance** - You know you're in trouble when the DVD advertises itself (and the film) as Mask of Venjence. If the studio could not be bothered to look up one of the three English words, do you seriously think that this release would be anything more than a non-glorified transfer from a shoddy VHS? I have no idea why anyone would put out a product like that, and I really wonder why anyone would spend time dubbing it in English just to butcher it afterwards. I hope they recuperated some of the money they had to pay all these people to do that ridiculous dubbing.

Lest anyone think that if it were not for the awful transfer this film could have rivaled Citizen Kane, let me make one thing clear. This indie outing makes any random Shaw Brothers film look like a massive Hollywood production. The film is cheaply made and it shows in sets, in locations, in cinematography, and in acting. It's as if they did not even have time to rehearse the actors properly, and a lot of the film seems to have been improvised on the spot. It's not

like the actors are bad, I have seen nearly all of them perform quite adequately in other films, so it's got to be the budget.

Or the director. I know that I said Pao Hsueh Li was not totally incompetent when I reviewed another dud of his, *Night of the Assassins*, which also somehow managed to star enough recognizable faces to make one wonder just how the staff succeeded in concocting that bland porridge. In Pao's defense I referred to other films he had made with slightly higher budgets, but now I am beginning to doubt my judgment. There is nothing in this film that really needed lots of money for the sets or special effects, and yet somehow it all looks incredibly cheap and unprofessional. The film even has five or six action choreographers and yet the fights are boring, the martial arts unimaginative, and the wire fu, well, swinging. Nothing to get excited about.

The story is utterly confusing and non-gripping. Despite the spoiler title, it does not really become clear just who is wreaking bloody vengeance upon whom until the very end when for the benefit of the baffled audience and the no more enlightened actors everything is explained by the main villain. Even after that particularly elaborate oration I had no clue about who some of the characters were supposed to be. For example, I have no idea who Shih Szu was supposed to be playing. What was her relation to the rest of the cast? Why did she even get involved in the whole scheme? (The whole scheme, by the way, is another one of those seemingly inexhaustible variations on "I want to take over the martial arts world" plot that is used with such enthusiasm you'd think it's one of the 10 basic plots Shakespeare identified.)

To the best of my knowledge (and mind you, I had to watch this film in two sittings since I fell asleep the first time somewhere in the middle), here's a rough idea of what goes on. I would not worry much about spoilers because knowing the story is not going to help you make heads or tails of this utter nonsense. Chang Chow (Ko Keung, and I have to say that all the names of characters are transliterations of what they sounded like in the English dub, so they should not be taken at face value) is a guy with a small... knife. To compensate for its size, the knife is made of jade. Or something. But it's not metal. It does cut through metal though. He shows up for a knife contest organized by some one-armed guy whose entire entourage wears masks (he does too, of course). Shu Wen (Shih Szu) shows up at the contest dressed as a man. I guess these pre-women's lib types were too backward to allow girls to knife guys or other girls, which we in our enlightened society have absolutely no problem with.

As I said, I do not know why she's there and it will never become clear. But she's dressed as a man, which in these movies is enough for everyone to believe that she is one. Putting aside the obvious fact that Shih Szu looks nothing like a man (or else I am gay), she drops out of the picture until the next time she would pop in with some vague explanation of her purpose. But Chang at least tells the guy in the mask that he does not know how to throw a party. That does get said guy riled up, some lame fighting ensues, and the whole meeting them adjourns with Chang being proclaimed the victor in the knife contest even though the sparring with the masked guy was extracurricular and even though Chang actually lost to him. This would make one suspect foul play worthy of the Olympic Committee but we forgive Chang because his small knife is faster than his brain.

In return for losing to the masked guy, Chang agrees to look for that guy's sworn nemesis, some disfigured cripple who is also blind and deaf. How a man who cannot see or hear anything can be a threat to anyone but a city that has not provided ramps for people with disabilities is never made clear although there is some portentous "do not judge a book by its cover" pseudo-explanation. Of course, with a blind/deaf guy, the book is more like one without pages, but we'll let it slide. So Chang is going to look for this guy while simultaneously looking for the guy he was looking for when he came to look for the guy who organized the knife contest. And while all this looking is going on, a bunch of people will be looking for Chang because of the knife-technique manual he "won" at the contest. So a lot of looking is happening while the audience is also looking for some meaning in the convoluted plot or, barring that, the way out.

Some thugs attempt to deprive Chang of the manual which he never reads but for some reason cannot part with either. Then there's the really intense Mei Han Tien (Han Yu) who has the most embarrassing scenes in the entire film (check out the one where he tries to deny he's not Mei by laughing so convincingly than a blind/deaf jury would convict him). What his role will not become clear until much later in the film but he's very intense and he does not like Chang. Chang, for his part, does not seem to dislike anybody although he's quite prepared to fight everyone. However, every time he gets to swing his little knife, some girl comes to his rescue. Usually it's Shih Szu's girl-who-does-not-look-like-a-man-although-everyone-thinks-she-is-one character, but at other times it's Nora Miao who really should have known better than to show up in this film. She also plays the flute. I don't know why I had to say it. It does not matter.

Lots and lots of fighting, explanations, and bizarre twists later, we find out that it's all about some sick love-rectangle that happened ten years ago (although I have to say the guys who were supposedly just born back then look more like 25 years old). Without naming names (how else would you be forced to stick it out to the bitter end), a woman (Chu Lai) fell in love with a man (Chang Yi Tao) who happened to be married (to Wang Lai). She got secretly engaged and pregnant by him but married another man (Hong Wai). She had the baby but her husband did not like the idea of being cuckolded, so he devised a brutal plan. He had his rival's entire family killed although it

appears he was somewhat delinquent in his efforts: the guy survived (blind/deaf but alive), and so did his wife, and so did his son. At least the bad guy sicced his own son on that unfortunate family although his son had no idea he was being set up.

During all of this, the unfaithful wife (who looks to be no more than 20 years old) was kept under lock and key only to be killed along with the other wife right at the end. It turns out Nora Miao may have been that wife's attendant, but I cannot be sure. Shih Szu is referred to as 'princess' on occasion but her role remains a complete mystery. Anyway, the conspiracy falls apart when Chang and Mei actually talk for a second or two between trying to hit each other in the groin, after which they collectively try to hit the bad guy in his groin. This is foiled because the bad guy has an iron hand (so he's not really one-armed), but this is not enough to save him when all the good guys and girls set upon him in the long honored tradition of many against one being no disgrace when done in the service of Good.

A truly stupid and uninspired film presented in an off-putting transfer that is shaky, muddy, blurry, with colors tending to a greenish cast, and with dubbing that would put a catatonic into a comma. Despite Shih Szu's presence (and she does get to flex a muscle or two in a couple of scenes), there is not anything to recommend this film. Even Shih Szu can't save it, by the way, because in spite of her formidable skills she is reduced to following the male protagonist like a love-sick puppy, spouting off romantic nonsense and batting eyelids bashfully right after saving his small-knifed ass from the next bunch of thugs. Nora Miao at least does not get to deliver inane love confessions but her scenes are even fewer. I only wanted to see this film because of Shih Szu, I admit. But I regret wasting my time. As I said before, the Venom Mob DVD is atrocious: the video is cropped (although there is a bit of pretty lame panning), so a lot of the action takes place off-screen now. Dubbed in stultifying English to boot. Avoid.

**Great Hunter, The (Taiwan, 1975: Larry Tu)** - The movie deserves kudos for playing it straight and not going for a typical kung-fu template (a militia leader is assassinated, Jimmy Wang Yu is after the truth, revenge etc baked in there) but a potentially cool atmosphere, memorable character image and a sinister tone attempted gets squandered by pure boredom and incoherence. A confrontation between Chan Hung-Lieh and Jimmy Wang Yu where they're trying to outduel each other underneath the courtesy and Chang Yi's projectile weapon during the finale livens up matters very little and The Great Hunter is one of usually dependable Jimmy's worst movies of the 70s. Also with Chia Ling and Hsu Feng.

**Greatest Thai Boxing, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Hsu Tseng-Hung)** - Centering around boxing in the titular country, the corruption and gangsters at ringside, in comes Fong Yau after revenge for his brother's death at the hand of said gangsters. Family wants this vicious circle broken though but if that would happen, there would be no movie. Well shot Thai scenery and boxing scenes, there's even some genuine emotions during the first reels. Ultimately The Greatest Thai Boxing falls down using genre clichés and in a rather muddled, amateurish way to boot. Director Hsu Tseng-Hung definitely provided better quality filmmaking with his groundbreaking Temple Of The Red Lotus in 1965.

**Green Dragon Inn (Taiwan, 1977: Wu Min-Hsiung) – aka Bruce is Loose** - Often overlooked is the obscure Taiwanese swordplay film *Green Dragon Inn*<sup>1</sup>, which gives us a unique variation on the formula established by its predecessor. The film, set in the Ming Dynasty like the other films, opens with the Chu family discussing the request of a certain Hung Bing-Chung to marry the patriarch's daughter. Nobody in the family is particularly pleased with the proposition, since Hung has time and again showed himself to be a bully protected by his father's wealth and influence. Their protestations don't go very far, though, since Hung shows up and proceeds to murder the entire family, including the object of his affections. Even in a dynasty that was as corrupt as the Ming, slaughtering an entire family is bound to call the attention of the authorities, no matter how influential your father is. The Emperor decrees Hung's arrest, which is carried out rather swiftly by the heroic Marshal Lau (played by Yueh Hua), following an exciting scuffle inside a brothel.

The arrest might have been easy, but transporting Hung to the capital is another question altogether. Apparently the only viable route will take the Marshal through Green Dragon Town, which all but belongs to Patriarch Hung. And Hung Sr. has already contracted a team of assassins, not to mention a mysterious "Iron Fist" expert named Fung Kung to guarantee that his son not be tried (and presumably executed) for his crimes by an imperial court. Despite

---

<sup>1</sup>Strangely enough, the film was released on DVD under the misleading title *Bruce Is Loose*, suggesting a Brucesploitation epic, despite none of the actors had ever imitated the Little Dragon.

having 30 imperial officers at his disposal, Marshal Lau is going to need a bit more help to deal with Hung's hired killers, not to mention the veritable army of lackeys already in Hung's employ. Said help will come in the forms of an enigmatic swordsman named Fong Fu-Meng (played by Lo Lieh) and a swordswoman(!) known only as Miss Chung (Polly Sheng Kwan Ling Feng). As the title implies, all parties will eventually congregate at the titular locale for a huge standoff.

*Green Dragon Inn* is for the most part an entertaining piece of low budget Taiwanese cinema, filled to the brim with solid, if not classic, action set pieces. The action director goes for a mix of more elaborate swordplay choreography with the sort of fencing one would see in a Hollywood swashbuckler. The cast is especially strong, bringing together a trio of performers who each starred in their own genre-important classics. Yueh Hua, the lead protagonist, had starred in King Hu's *Come Drink With Me*, generally credited as the first modern martial arts/swordplay film. Polly Kwan, as already noted, had played the heroine in the original *Dragon Gate Inn*, while Lo Lieh had starred in *Five Fingers of Death*, the film that started the whole kung fu craze in the USA. Each of the three turn in good performances, with Polly Kwan's bloody entrance being of the film's most memorable scenes. The movie moves at a fast pace, stopping only to build up more tension before the next fight breaks out. The film only stumbles in its failure to adequately explain the interest Lo Lieh has in Hung case, as well as not giving Polly Kwan more room to show off her powerful martial arts skills.

What's interesting about *Green Dragon Inn* is how it diverges from its inspiration. On the outside, the film follows *Dragon Gate Inn* in most general respects. Super-powerful white-haired villain? Check. Heroic swordswoman? Check. People trapped in an inn while an army of bad guys wait outside? Check. Villains who represent a corrupt system? Check. However, once you get past that, the differences begin to stand out.

First of all, and probably the most superficial of the differences is the nature of the mission. In the original film, our heroes are out to protect innocent people, in this case an official's children, from the bad guys. Here, the heroes are escorting a criminal through enemy territory, bringing back memories of classic Westerns like *Rio Bravo* and the original *3:10 to Yuma*.

Second, there's the location of the inn. In the original and its remake, the inn is located in the middle of the wilderness, on the outskirts of the empire. Here, *Green Dragon Inn* is in the middle of the town. An inn on the edge of the frontier adds a degree of ambiguity to the question "Which side has the bigger advantage?" On one hand, the heroes are on the edge of the villain's jurisdiction, and a successful flight can mean complete freedom from persecution. However, the further removed from the capital the parties are, the more a corrupt official is allowed to act outside of his powers in order to achieve his goal. Contrast that with the setting of *Green Dragon Inn*, where *Green Dragon Town* is right in the middle of Patriarch Hung's circle of influence. This clearly stacks the deck against the heroes, since escaping the inn itself does not in any way put them at an advantage against Hung. So even if our heroes quickly take control of the establishment, it does them little good in the context of their mission.

Speaking of Hung, the nature of the villains and heroes is almost inverted. Like many Asian states who had bouts with communism, Taiwan was subject to a right-wing government that was arguably just as oppressive as the communist government that it had separated itself from. Thus, the original *Dragon Gate Inn* was a commentary on the corruption of Taiwan's then government, which killed and tortured thousands in the name of protecting the state from left-wing revolutionaries. In other words, the Secret Service and spies in the government employ were to be feared just as much as the subversive groups they were hunting.

If *Dragon Gate Inn* was a staunchly anti-fascist movie, then *Green Dragon Inn* can be seen as being in favor of a Unitary system. Here, the heroes are in the employ of the emperor, and the central government is the last bastion of justice in a world where power-hungry nobles run amok and the local government is either too spineless or indifferent to do anything about it. Here the system works, and the heroes are either working directly for, or at least in conjunction with, said system, as opposed to its predecessor, where the system has failed because too many working within it got drunk on their power.

Politics aside, *Green Dragon Inn* remains a solid example of the genre. The plot is compelling enough to maintain interest in between the fights and to make you root for the good guys, especially during the final reel when the stakes are at their highest. While definitely low budget, the film doesn't have the garish costumes characteristic of many Taiwanese films, which give the impression that the filmmakers just cobbled together whatever was lying around at the moment. It's a solid take on a well-known formula that tweaks it enough to distinguish itself, while still hitting the expected story beats. Recommended.

**Green Jade Statuette (Taiwan, 1978: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Lee Tso Nam follows up his groundbreaking 'The Hot, the Cool and the Vicious' with another, equally enjoyable, collaboration with action director Tommy Lee. While featuring many of the same cast, Tan Tao Liang and Wong Tao didn't return and instead we get Chi Kwan Chun and Mang Fei in similar respective roles to the previous film.

The film carries many of the elements of its predecessor and again shows influences from the Spaghetti westerns that were popular at the time. In a plot full of intrigue, mysterious strangers converge on 'Stone Village' in search of the precious 'Green Jade Statuette', reputedly stolen in a violent robbery which left a whole family dead a year ago. The gang responsible are expected to arrive in the village and many interested parties lie in wait; there's Chi Kwan Chun, in the 'sheriff' role, determined to repel all trouble makers from the town and Mang Fei as a hired killer who is blackmailing the brothel owner, her brother being one of the gang responsible for the killings. Also there's a strange enigmatic type who, rather dramatically, likes to leave roses on dead bodies and quote his catch phrase 'even the dead like roses', at regular intervals. Not to mention the strange hump backed, bucktoothed innkeeper. Interestingly, the motivations for each of the main players are not clear until later, creating a real sense of intrigue, and its not immediately apparent on which side of good and evil they all sit (rather like the first film).

There's seems to have been more money available for this production as sets and costumes are rather more ornate than in the previous film. More time also seems to have been taken over the fight scenes, of which there are many, and the choreography seems rather more sharp. However, without the excellent leg work of Tan Tao Liang, it would be difficult to rate this better than the first film and at times it does just seem like the repeat of a successful formula without quite all of the ingredients. It's definitely worth a watch though, if only for another interesting villain provided by Tommy Lee.

**Guy with Secret Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1981: Joe Law)** - The setting of the film is the early Qing Dynasty (circ. 1644): The Qings have just taken over and are now oppressing the Chinese people to no end. Fortunately, there are a number of revolutionaries out, fighting the Qing and trying to free the Han Chinese from the iron fist of the Manchu emperor, Kung Tzu. Two of the said revolutionaries are the great folk heroes, Hung Wen Ting (Meng Fei, King Boxer) and Hu Yang-Pao (Li Chung Chien, Invincible Kung Fu Trio), are on the run from government assassins, who kill two of their compatriots (plus the mother of one of them) before the opening credits.

Just a quick observation, there was a real life kung fu fighter named Hong Wen-Ting (Hung Man-Ting). He was the son of Hong Xiguan (Hung Hey-Kwun), the founder of the hung gar style and a famous anti-Qing patriot. I wonder if Meng Fei is portraying the same, since the fighting styles and the time period match about right.

We meet our two heroes as they are fishing in a river. While Hung is trying to catch a crab, they hear a girl screaming: she and her old father are being attacked by a bunch of would-be rapists who are rowing upstream. Hung and Hu come to their rescue, and beat the thugs into submission. The thugs turn out to be members of the Dragon Gang, a gang of evil people whom the government suspects may be trying to overthrow the emperor. The leader is a woman, whom we'll call the Dragon mistress (Sally Chen, Dream of the Red Chamber). She chastises her men for getting beat up and orders them to kill the two interlopers.

Shortly after the initial encounter, the Dragon Gang sees Hu, who is walking through the city. They set up an ambush for him, complete with bombs and flaming carts. Although he is able to escape, he ends up bumping into a provincial judge while running through the street. The judge orders his arrest, and Hu is able to fend for himself until the judge takes a woman hostage, after which Hu turns himself in.

Hung finds out about his friend's capture and decides to rescue him. He does so by breaking up the procession of guards on the way to the jail, which he is able to do by dropping his money on the ground and making it look like an accident. While all the guards are trying to help him pick up the coins, he steals away into the jail and frees his friend, and a portly butcher who was also imprisoned. Their escape attempt goes sour when the royal guard surrounds them, and, after some fighting, both are thrown into jail.

Hung and Hu are released from jail when the high official receives a government order that the Dragon Gang be destroyed. The high official reasons that they could have Hung and Hu do the dirty work, after which the guards could easily kill them. Shortly after their release, Hung returns to the jail to beat up the provincial judge and free the butcher, who was still in the jail. Let me state here that the butcher subplot goes absolutely nowhere and he isn't heard from for the rest of the film.

A few days later, Hung and Hu happen across some Dragon Gang thugs who are trying to beat up an old man and his daughter, who owe them money. Hung and Hu step in and kill some of the gang members in the ensuing fight, not to mention winning the favor of the man and his daughter, the latter of whom falls for Hung. That night, Hung is out

looking for food for the four and he happens across a restaurant where the female owner is crying. She explains that her son was chosen by the Dragon mistress to be her husband, and that the Dragon mistress has a knack for killing her husbands if they don't satisfy her. Hung finds this a good opportunity to infiltrate the Dragon Gang, posing as the groom.

So they go ahead with their plan and Hung tries to kill the Dragon Mistress in their wedding chamber, but she's able to poison him before he can slit her throat. A fight breaks out between the Dragon Mistress and a Taoist sorcerer (Shut Chung-Tin, Jade Dagger Ninja and Flying Guillotine, Part 2) in her employ, and our two heroes. Our heroes are able to flee, where the old man is able to restore Hung's health.

By this time, the evil sorcerer decides to fight dirty against our heroes, so he turns a large muscular man (Cheng Fu-Heng, The Fearless Hyena) into a zombie and sends him to kill the old man and kidnap his daughter (Nancy Yen, The Seven Grandmasters). Hung and Hu confront the zombie but are no match for it, and are beaten up quite well. There they meet a coffin maker and his daughter, the latter falls for Hu (because both our heroes need a nubile woman that we can imagine them getting with at the film's end). Let me note parenthetically that the coffin maker and his daughter had appeared earlier in the film, although they seemed like a pair of extraneous characters until now. Coincidentally, the daughter has a martial arts manual that teaches a style needed to defeat the leaders of the Dragon Gang, plus a formula for a powder that can defeat the zombie...

If there is any problem with this film, it's that the plot is pretty muddled and hard to follow, especially in the beginning. I mean it makes its own kind of sense, but there are far too many characters being introduced in the first act that it's easy to get confused before things settle down a bit. We have our heroes, the Dragon Gang, the provincial judge, the evil official, the coffin maker and his daughter, that butcher that the heroes have to rescue for no reason whatsoever, and the medicine salesman and his daughter. There are some auxiliary heroes shown in the film's opening that get murdered off the bat, so I wonder what the whole point of putting them into the film was. The film is fairly fast-paced, although it loses a little bit of momentum near the end before the final set-pieces, although this happens in a lot of kung fu films.

The title of the film in Portuguese is *Zumbis do Kung Fu*, which translates into "Kung Fu Zombies." That is partially accurate; there is only one zombie, but he does fight. Our heroes almost get transformed into zombies, so I guess that's what made the translators feel justified in pluralizing the name. Let be honest, however, and state that the zombie doesn't have a HUGE role in the film, he's just an invincible lackey for the main bad guys and gets about 15 minutes of screen time or so. Now, in the English dub, the zombie is referred to as a "demon." When we see him being "created", the Taoist sorcerer is performing a spell on the body of a regular person, which leads me to believe that the word "zumbi" used in the Portuguese title is just as accurate as "demon" in English, since the zombie is essentially a traditional voodoo-created zombie instead of a Romero-esque gut-muncher. Originally, a zombie was a person whose soul was captured by a voodoo practitioner, and thus was under the control of whomever had possession of the soul. The zombie here is the same thing, but rather than voodoo, it's created by Taoist black magic. The zombie here does try to bite our heroes on a few occasions, giving it a minute resemblance to those zombies popularized by George Romero, but not too much.

The action direction is provided by Chen Mu Chuan, Sun Chi, and Huang Chih-Wei. Chen Mu Chuan is probably the most recognized of the three action directors, if not by name, then at least by his work. Chen was a fairly solid action director in Taiwan whose career allowed him to work with quite a number of famous people, including Chen Kuan-Tai and David Chiang. He definitely wasn't as good as other Taiwanese action directors like Robert Tai, Tommy Lee, and Alan Chui, but he did have a few good moments from time to time. His best known film is the 1977 classic *Iron Monkey*, starring Chen Kuan Tai and Kam Kong. I think the film is a bit overrated and the action slow, but a lot of people love the film. He also furnished the action direction in David Chiang's *Lost Kung Fu Secrets* and the cult "favorite", *Crippled Masters* (the film that featured actual crippled people doing martial arts), both of which were reviewed by Nate Shumate of Cold Fusion Video (and both of which Nate wasn't very enthusiastic about), not to mention the universally-despised *Kung Fu of 8 Drunkards*. Chen Mu Chuan does furnish quite a few solid fights in this film, leading me to believe that he could do some good work if he had the time, budget, and talent in front of the camera.

There are quite a few fights in this film and Chen and his cohorts make a valiant attempt to keep the action at as quick a pace the film itself. There are lots of weapons on display in the film, including sabers, dart guns, spears that transform into 3-section staffs, stone hammers, knives, and fans. The Dragon Gang mistress uses a dart gun that is reminiscent of the one that Cheng Pei-Pei uses in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), which is odd, considering that Ang Lee claimed that weapon was thought up by him. Early on, there's a fight between Li Chung Chien and some Dragon Gang thugs where they use bombs full of lime powder and flaming carts, which makes for some interesting images. The fight between Meng Fei, Li Chun Chien, and the zombie reminds one of those fights involving iron vest masters, in which they hit him, he stands still, and nothing happens.

The action stays pretty creative until the end, when our heroes have to fight the evil official, who's a master of the Toad style. The Toad style looks like it might have inspired the final fight of Kung Fu Hustle (2004), in which the villain "ribbits" like a toad does lots of toad-looking jump attacks. Also, Chen Mu Chuan takes a few pages from the Five Deadly Venoms (1978) and has the villain be nearly invincible, like the Lo Meng, the Toad Venom, was in that film. It is one of the best fights in the film, probably bested only by the previous free-for-all with the spear men. That fight was pretty cool, since it had Meng Fei and Li Chung Chien fighting a host of lackeys armed with spears that became grappling hooks and sabers with their bare hands and the occasional pole.

Meng Fei and Li Chung Chien looks pretty good during the film. Both actors use a number of Southern Shaolin styles, most notably hung gar (the Tiger-Crane style). Meng Fei was pretty talented martial artist who shot for the stars in the early 1970s, with films like Five Shaolin Masters and Prodigal Boxer, but quickly was relegated to Taiwanese films, where his career "flourished" to some degree. He fights quite good here, to be perfectly honest, and I can safely say that it's one of his better films, fight-wise (for the record, the best fight I've seen from Meng Fei was the final fight for the Joseph Kuo film The Unbeaten 28). He certainly looks better here than in his early chopsocky films, that's for sure. I'm not very familiar with Li Chung Chien's work, but he does some solid fighting here, which is enough for me.

I'll give this a film a marginal recommendation. The fights are better than expected and Chen Mu Chuan and company do an honest-to-God job to shake things up for each fight. The presence of a Taoist sorcerer and a kung fu zombie is also welcome, not to mention a villain who uses a Toad style of kung fu. The plot is something of a mess, but I've been through films that are worse. When watching a Taiwanese kung fu film, you instinctively lower standards more than you would for a Jackie Chan film or a Shaw Brothers film. As a result, when films like this come along, you end being pleasantly surprised and enjoy the film more than you normally would.

**Half a Loaf of Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1980: Jackie Chan)** - Jackie Chan's first attempt at kung fu comedy (and a thumb of the nose to Lo Wei, if Jackie's "autobiography" is to be believed) was apparently considered so bad by Lo that he shelved it (a bit harsh considering this is the man who directed Seaman No 7). Even at the height of Jackie mania, HALOKF didn't get released in HK until 1980, when Jackie had flown the LW coup, and by which time there was far worse kung fu comedies clogging the arteries of moviegoers with the bad cholesterol of huge moles, stutters, bodily functions, and people in goofy wigs.

I do wonder whether Lo Wei was that careless with his finances that he'd throw money at a film called Half a Loaf of Kung Fu and then complain when he got a silly farce. I have two theories: one is that Lo gave Jackie and Chen Chi-Hwa a serious script that they filled full of jokes, the other is that distributors didn't want this anymore then they wanted Spiritual Kung Fu or Dragon Fist, and HALOKF was simply the last one to be released. Honestly, there is so much baloney in Jackie books...

Well, I do sympathise with Lo to a certain extent. Once its hilarious opening (where Jackie parodies everyone from Zatoichi to Chang Cheh style swordsmen) is over, the film loses its footing, with Jackie staggering from one place to the next in search of a job, all the while being clueless about kung fu (except in his dreams) and getting into trouble when he pretends to be the recently deceased Whip Hero. Meanwhile, the strangest bunch of characters this side of a Cannonball Run movie chase around trying to get hold of the Macguffin Evergreen Jade...and the Soul Pills too!

The film's idea of comedy is mostly to try out a different trick in every scene, whether it is necessary or not. So whilst the opening sequence, Jackie's Popeye influenced dream, Jackie getting the Whip Hero killed etc are quite clever, we have a scene where the Judge has an almighty crick in his neck and the town councilmen are one stutterer and a perpetual giggler. They are dead ends in a film overflowing with them.

The fighting is pretty damn uninspired too. Too many of the fights don't really build to a proper finish, Jackie either runs away or gets saved. The end fight has similar momentum problems, but at least Jackie using Lung Chun-Ehr as a weapon, and Kam Kong's wig as a nunchaku are awesome.

The supporting cast does help prop up the movie: Lung is definitely at her loviest, as is and the kung fu comedy beggars Dean Shek and Lee Man-Tai have good cameos (could have done without the former's flatulence problems...). Poor James Tien looks faintly embarrassed, almost as though he thought this was going to a serious film, and Kam Kong's villain is too little, too late. I'd like to have seen more of secondary villainess Lee Chi-Un and her lackey Mao Tien, but they are underused. Frankie Chan's score is mostly random comic wah wah music but he does use a very effective faux-oriental track for the travelling scenes, and a brilliant use of the Jesus Christ Superstar theme.



Given its late release, HALOKF ends up looking more like an imitation than a prototype. It's undisciplined and immature, but not without its flashes of genius.

And what was with that dude with the Pippi Lockstocking hairdo?

**Handcuff, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Wu Ma)** - I don't how I found any faults with this the first time around, but seeing the copy Jamal made makes me want a wide screen print BAD. This is hands down, my favorite non-wuxia role of CHAN WAI MAN's and the more I watch it, the more I find great little details (such as things an assassin would do. Katana down your pants so you look like you're limping - *check*. A David and Goliath way to discreetly kill a target - *check*. Sword cane, well of course, I mean, *check*.)

Chan Wai Man's Ah Keung (a.k.a. The Green Dragon) wants to get out of the assassination business after a hit gone wrong turns many of his brothers against him. But not Ah Keung's god father whom Ah continues to work with until ... well I won't say. And there's the added complication of Ah Keung's childhood friend turned cop tracking the Green Dragon. Will these two clash?

Some down and dirty fighting here, I love the fight between CHAN WAI MAN and Lo Lieh. (SPOILER - if you haven't seen the film and don't want to know the outcome, don't watch this fight.) Chan does some insane stuff in this film including the notorious jumping off the high suspension bridge. He seems to really up his acting game too, but I knew he was good once I saw him play vulnerable in *The Deadly Breaking Sword*. *It's said that Chan had a part in writing this and was the action director* (I can clearly see the latter and hats off if he wrote too. It's an excellent story.)

**Hands Of Death (Taiwan, 1974: Roc Tien Peng) - a.k.a The Tongfather; The Notorious Bandit; Hong Kong Godfather** - Roc Tien stars as a cool hard undercover agent who punches his way through a Japanese crime lords gang. He's paired up with a sidekick played by Tin Hok. There out not only to destroy the Japanese opium ring but to avenge the death of one of their fellow agents. The last man sent undercover to expose the gang ended up dead before he could bring the criminals to justice.

This film is a gritty grind house movie that pulls no punches. There's no goofy comic relief characters or odd Martial Arts styles in this one. Roc Tien not only stars in this feature but scripted & directed it too. Like so many films of the time its basic theme revolves around a Chinese hero fighting against the evil Japanese oppressors. Only these Japanese are smuggling drugs and not shutting down the local Kung Fu dojo.

There's no love interest or other distractions for our two heroes. They want Yee Yuen who plays the crime boss and mastermind behind the drug ring. Only he's surrounded by an assortment of tough fighters. One of them played by HK regular Tsui Hung (*Shaolin Deadly Kicks*), the one actor who might have appeared in more Kung Fu films than Lung Fei. He turns up in nearly every film I watch or at least it seems that way sometimes. When our hero isn't chain smoking he's fighting his way through Yuen's henchman. He smokes so often he kinda comes across like a Kung Fu Humfrey Bogart.

The action scenes I really enjoyed even though it leans more to the basher style popular at the time. The choreography staged by Yu Tie Long & Wong Wing Sang is a notch above the usual independent action scenes of the era.

Roc Tien is a charismatic and capable screen fighter. He relies heavily on his upper body & hand skills here but does show off some nice kicks too. His co-star Tin Hok who I'm not too familiar with holds his own and puts in a good performance also. Know one action scene stands out but the same standard is kept throughout the film.

The music featured in the film is your usual generic 70's HK soundtrack. No use of The Enter The Dragon soundtrack thankfully. I read online that the main theme in the film is a cover of The Temptations Papa Was A Rolling Stone.

I wouldn't recommend anyone to rush into getting Hands Of Death on DVD. However I found it to be an entertaining film and certainly one for fans of Roc Tien.

**Hapkido (Hong Kong, 1972: Huang Feng) - aka Lady Kung Fu** - Originally I wanted to see this movie years ago because Jackie Chan has some background stunt scenes where he gets beat up in at least one of them by “big brother” Sammo Hung. But after years of watching Hong Kong films I wanted/needed to see more early films from both Golden Harvest and Angela Mao.

The plot is derivative of *Fist of Fury* (this takes place in 1934) and it will do nothing to further positive relationships with Japan – seriously every Japanese character is an evil slobbering caricature with a few sporting a Hitler I mean Jordan I mean Chaplin mustache. But the action is quite good. While I do not see much karate style from the Japanese antagonists, there is plenty of “basher” (free-fighting) moments mixed with hapkido and kung fu fighting styles from athletic and capable Angela Mao, Sammo Hung, Carter Wong (in his first film), hapkido experts Whang In-shik (his first big role) and Ji Han-jae (also his first role though he did only a few films.)

How fun is it to see both Whang In-shik and Ji Han-jae (check out a high kick arm trap he does early in the film) in action. Superb martial artists who get to showcase the art of hapkido. Angela Mao is also fun to watch as she is quick, flexible and a solid fighter. Though since she has shorter limbs it is always important for who she fights with to “sell” her movements (you can find a similar analogy in determining a quality match in professional wrestling) and the choreography is done well here with Sammo Hung as the action director (try to see how many films director Wong Fun has done without either Hung or Mao.) Sammo is impressive himself though I think his best fighting work was done in the late 70s when his girth seemed to be done at its lowest point (plus the experience of choreography over that decade has helped as well.)

I was a little disappointed with the final fight scene because Black Bear boss (Yamane Teruo) just did not seem as good as everyone else. But overall I think this is a solid film for martial art fans with plenty of quality action and early appearances from many pertinent martial art stars.

**Hard As A Dragon (Taiwan, 1974: Raymond Lui)** - Starring, directed by, written by and co-choreographed by Raymond Lui, he puts himself front and center in a movie designed for action. Thankfully being an early 70s basher with a thin plot as a springboard for kung fu, Lui and crew delivers. Featuring plentiful scenes of hard hitting and primal martial arts, *Hard As A Dragon* (aka *The Tiger Jump*) does surprisingly well considering it exists for one thing only.

**Hard Bastard (South Korea, 1981: Godfrey Ho)** - **Aka Raging Rivals; Hands of Lightning** - By the early 80s, I’m pretty sure Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee was tired of being typecast as the villain and decided to branch out a little bit. I’m guessing that Hong Kong and Taiwanese studios weren’t all that willing to turn one of their big-time villains into the good guy, so Hwang eventually turned to his native Korea for a little more creative control. Although he still played the villain in most of his Korean movies, he still got a few chances to play the protagonist. There are at least three films during this period in which he was the good guy, those being *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha*; *Buddhist Fist and Tiger Claws*; and *Hard Bastard*.

The story to this movie is rather simple. Hwang Jang Lee plays Medicine Man, a trumpet-playing, *tae kwon do* kicking, pill-peddling gypsy working in the employ of a character we’ll call Fatty (Gam Kei-Chu, of *King Boxer* and *Action Tae Kwon Do*) and his sister, who’s Hwang’s fiancée. The three arrive in Shanghai, which, despite being one of the most populous cities in the world, is awfully devoid of inhabitants. While selling their wares, they come into conflict with the local extortion racket, led by Weasly Guy (Choi Sung-Kyu, of *Bruce and Shaolin Kung Fu*). They beat up Weasly Guy and his cronies, who run back to their boss, whom we’ll call Old Master (Lee Hae-Ryong of *Dragon Lee Fights Back*). Old Master sends a couple of top fighters to deal with Medicine Man, but he beats them up, strips them naked, and sends them running home to their mommies. Word of this eventually reaches the ears of Old Master’s Boss, the Ugly Guy (*Kill the Shogun*’s Bruce Cheung—actually, this movie is so full of ugly guys that Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee ends being the most attractive male in the cast!).

Ugly Guy and his men try to snuff our heroes, but they are assisted by an old kung fu master who’s currently working as a noodle salesman (Han Tae-Il, who showed up in both *Returned Single-Legged Man* films, for what that’s worth). The three retire to the countryside after being denied a place to stay by the locals, despite their being in one of the biggest cities in the world that would easily give them more than enough alternatives of places to stay. Weasly Guy and his goons try to kidnap/rape/beat up Hwang’s girl when she goes back into town at night to run some errands. She’s saved by Ho Lim, Old Master’s son. Ho Lim is good guy who’s against his father selling out to

Ugly Guy and transforming their dojo into a night club. Anyway, Ho Lim and Hwang's fiancée fall for each other, while Hwang falls for a hostess at Ugly Guy's night club.

Long story short: Old Master repents and tries to give back to the community. Ho Lim and fiancée girl become an item. Hwang has sex. Ugly Guy sends his Uglier Goon (Kwan Il-Sung of *Twelve Gates of Hell*) and his lackies to kill off the supporting cast, leaving Hwang, Fatty, Noodle Salesman, and Fiancée Girl to get revenge.

The most impressive part of this movie is Hwang Jang Lee's performance. When he played the hero in *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha*, he wasn't too far removed from his other villainous characters, showing a certain sadistic streak when he had to deal with Tino Wong at the end. But here, he's practically playing the same character Jackie Chan played in *The Drunken Master*, the playfully arrogant, yet still likable, kung fu kicking goof. Hwang mugs and makes faces for the camera, dons disguises for comic value, dresses in suits and dress shirts that one could only wear during the 70s, and performs acrobatics that wouldn't be out of place in a late 1970s kung fu comedy. Heck, he even has a legitimate love scene for crying out loud! I don't care what anyone says, this is not your typical Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee.

The plot, on the other hand, is your typical stranger-fights-against-extortionists story that had gotten hoary back in the early 1970s. Few surprises are to be found here, which means that viewers will have to find entertainment in Hwang's unconventional role and the films copious fight scenes. John Loh, whoever he is, choreographs the fights in the traditional early 1970s "basher" style, with some acrobatics and Hwang's flashy kicking to keep things interesting. The handwork mainly consists of basic blocks and Mississippi Haymaker punches, but they're executed with enough rhythm that the fights never feel slow. Hwang gets to perform his triple no-shadow kick, his leg-lock kick, and his jump-past-the-guy-and-back-kick-him-on-the-way-down kick, which should keep fans pleased. Nobody else in the cast stands out in the fight department. But then again, they really shouldn't. While not quite a vanity project, it is obviously a very personal project for our Legendary Superkicker. It was his way of telling the world that he wasn't the high-kicking scuzzbucket that he built his career on playing, but a normal human being with other talents, desires, and aspirations. It's a little disappointing that this well-rounded human being Hwang was inserted into such a generic story, but fans of the Superkicker owe it to themselves to check this film out.

**Hard Man with Guts (Taiwan, 1973: Sung Chuen Sau, Ang Fung)** - A young man escapes from prison and returns home, where he robs a Japanese soldier (Yee Yuen) who is helped by a Chinese traitor (Suen Yuet, as usual...). He is helped by Chiang Ming and Chan Wai Lau for the robbery and previously, he meets his lover (Hu Chin).

After killing his parents, Yee Yuen kidnaps Hu Chin and this one tells her lover's younger brother to find him in the place where he hides and to kill him (I'm talking about Yee Yuen), because she knows that in order to avoid to talk under torture, she will kill herself.

I don't know if I did a good summary of the plot because as there aren't subtitles, it's a little bit difficult to understand why the hero was in prison, why there is this enmity between Yee Yuen, Suen Yuet and the hero and why there is this robbery. It's a very good movie and Ang Fung is excellent in all his fights.

**Have Sword, Will travel (Hong Kong, 1969: Chang Cheh)** - If the title of Chang Cheh's 1969 martial arts/sword play film *Have Sword Will Travel* sounds familiar, that's because the production borrowed its name to a certain extent from the popular TV western series, *Have Gun Will Travel*. The film has more in common with that series than simply its name, however, as it's basically a western set in China.

After a fantastic opening credits sequence where swordsmen fly around and slash at one another, we meet Siang (Ti Lung) and Piau-Piau (the adorable Li Ching), two martial artists who are soon to be wed. These two answer to their master, Lord In (Cheng Miu), who is known for his ability to escort large shipments of valuables through bandit infested territory. In is getting on in years, however, and so when is asked to help bring a massive cache of gold across the province, he opts to send Siang and Piau-Piau in his place. He does this so that people won't think that he's in cahoots with the bandits, which is what he is told will happen if he denies the request.

As our two heroes begin their journey they soon run afoul of a gang of bad guys called the Flying Tiger gang, lead by Jiao Hong (Guk Fung), who are intent on stealing the gold and keeping it for themselves. When a strange but highly skilled swordsman named Yi Lo (David Chiang) and his horse show up in the area, he winds up saving Piau-Piau from the Flying Tigers just in time. Siang shows up a little too late to help out and Piau-Piau insists that Siang invite Yi Lo

to accompany them to the Invincible City. Siang doesn't trust this man, however, and for good reason as it doesn't take long before he notices that Yi Lo is making eyes at his lady and that she's not at all upset by this recent turn of events.

Despite their differences, Yi Lo and Siang eventually team up to get the gold to its destination. They know that they need one another's help if they're going to make it through the Flying Tiger's territory which is laden with traps and which is patrolled by a spear fighter named Pestilence (Chan Sing) and a mute named Ghost Shadow (Wong Chung) who has insanely cool jumping abilities and martial skill.

An interesting story of how two men must put aside their differences and team up for the greater good, *Have Sword Will Travel* is a stylish swordplay movie full of the heroic male characters that Chang Cheh's films are known for. Yi Lo is akin to many of the lone gunfighter characters that were popular in Spaghetti Westerns of the time and despite the prominent romantic subplot, the film builds to a fairly violent conclusion full of slow motion accent shots and bloodshed. While the movie takes a little while to get there and doesn't provide as much action as a lot of martial arts movies made around the same time did, the finale makes it all worth while as our two heroes square off against the toughest that the Flying Tigers have to offer.

Performance wise, everyone is quite good in his or her respective roles with David Chiang stealing the show. His Yi Lo is a man of few words but does a great job of expressing himself with his eyes and his face. While the other performers might better him when it comes to martial arts form, none of them top him in terms of sheer coolness. The fight choreography in the movie is strong, with a big emphasis put on weapons fighting rather than traditional hand-to-hand kung fu combat. This gives the movie some additional flair and keeps it visually interesting even if many of the fights in the film are fairly quick and to the point. Piau-Piau's penchant for throwing little knives at her enemies is pretty nifty as are many of Pestilence's spear fighting maneuvers.

Chang Cheh would go on to make faster paced and bloodier fight films than this one but even with some pacing issues *Have Sword Will Travel* is a strong earlier effort from the man who would go on to give us classics like *Vengeance* and *The Five Deadly Venoms*.

**He Has Nothing But Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1977: Lau Kar-Wing)** - In the west Sammo Hung, Jackie Chan and Yuen Woo-Ping are the best known names associated with k-f comedy, but there were many others involved with this sub-genre; such as Wong Yu, kung-fu comedy's original naughty kid or actor/action choreographer Lau Kar-wing (also known as Liu Chia-yung). Besides Lau's fruitful association with Sammo and zany director Mak Kar (a.k.a. Karl Mak) in such films as *DIRTY TIGER CRAZY FROG* (78) and *KNOCKABOUT* (79), he also directed a string of movies of his own. *HE HAS NOTHING BUT KUNG-FU* (1977) was his directorial debut in which he paired Wong Yu with his own adopted brother Lau Kar-fei (better known in the west as Gordon Liu).

Sha-Shan (Wong Yu) is a small time conman who earns a living swindling people or through pick-pocketing. One day he crosses the path of a young amnesiac wanderer (Gordon Liu) who he soon discovers is gifted with remarkable kung-fu skills. Naturally he takes great advantage of the situation by manipulating the unfortunate fellow but in time as Sha-Shan picks-up some fighting moves from the wanderer he also develops a friendship with him. It turns out that the amnesiac is actually the lost son of a respected admiral who has gone searching for Liu himself. He is not the only one looking for him however, as a powerful local boss and his cronies (Chiang Tao, Chan Shen Lee Hoi-sang, and Wilson Tong) who have lost much money thanks to Sha-Shan and the Wanderer's meddling would like to settle some scores too.

*HE HAS NOTHING BUT K-F* is a lively burlesque farce full of slapstick, pratfalls and k-f fights. Wily comedian Wong Yu and straight-man Gordon Liu have great chemistry together and are an excellent pairing; the perfect foils for each other. Young cutie Hui Chin as a feisty slap-prone inn-hostess is also delightful eye candy. The film direction is rather rough but remains nonetheless efficient. It has to be said however that the film brand of broad burlesque humour may not be to everyone's taste. Some may find it just plain stupid. A big part of the problem lies with the bad dubbing. It's quite clear that a bad dub in a k-f movie often creates unwarranted comedy in a highly dramatic movie, or can make a comedy even sillier and more inane than it actually is in its original language. Here's an example. At one point Sha-Shan and the amnesiac Gordon Liu cross the latter's father who is looking for him.

THE FATHER: You're my son.

GORDON: (confused) what does he mean?

SHA-SHAN: He's implying that he sleeps with your mother.

GORDON: WHAT! (suddenly enraged he attacks his father).

Needless to say that short interchange would work much better within the scene's context in its original language. The overall effect feels as bad as having a Steven Chow comedy done in badly dubbed English.

Thankfully k-f displays are unaffected by bad dubbing: Gordon Liu is in top shape and the fight choreography is of the old school's un-enhanced variety as we would expect from a Lau movie, with Gordon thrashing left and right. Wong Yu is obviously not quite as seasoned a martial artist as his partner is but as a finger agile swindler he is very good and his facial mimicry is priceless. This said, the best fight display is between Gordon and director Lau Kar-wing himself, who plays an aide to the admiral. He is quite sharp and funny too as he has to hold himself back so as not to hurt the Admiral's son while the latter has no such restraint... ouch. The final showdown that unravels partly on a rooftop is also very good, as it makes excellent use of its environment of awkwardly leaned tile tops and wooden beams. It has to be said however that in the film's last quarter the script falls apart to some degree as Gordon retrieves his memory and the film finishes in one of those typical k-f movie abrupt endings leaving a lot of plot threads in the air. But heck, since these last ten minutes are so full of relentless fighting how could one complain.

Lau Kar-wing is the younger brother of famed martial art filmmaker Lau Kar-leung who in 1975 with his own directorial debut SPIRITUAL BOXER created the first real k-f comedy starring Wong Yu, in the lead role. This is a three full years before Jackie Chan's k-f comedy combo of SNAKE IN THE EAGLE SHADOW and DRUNKEN MASTER (erroneously viewed by many as k-f comedy's starting point). Lau Kar-wing followed his brother's footsteps two-year after him, in a similarly spirited burlesque farce also starring Wong Yu and the addition of his other (adopted) brother Gordon. Not as gifted or as successful a director as his older sibling or as Sammo Hung and Mak Kar (the other K-F comedy lead figures of the time) he never became a groundbreaking force as they did, but he still made a string of enjoyable, lively if slight k-f comedies. The best known: THE ODD COUPLE where he paired himself with Sammo, arguably his best effort, as well as TREASURE HUNTERS starring Shaw Brother player Fu Sheng, the ill fated star in one of his last films before his premature death. Once the k-f comedy trend was over, Lau Kar-wing recycled himself by directing action comedies or potboilers. The best known was SKINNY TIGER and FATTY DRAGON in which he paired his old partners Sammo and Mak Kar.

Wong Yu can be deemed the unsung k-f comedy's prototypical mischievous kid as not only does he remain largely unrecognised in the west, but the little information that is available about him is often inaccurate. Indeed he has been described in many sources as Shaw Brother's reply to Jackie Chan's naughty kid while in fact he preceded Jackie's emergence by years. While not quite actually the first modern k-f naughty kid, (that would be Fu Sheng), he was the first to really do fully-fledged comedy. Wily and a bit scruffy looking, he was far from the conventional ideal of a stoic hard-boiled martial art hero but had a quirky comedic flair, which made him perfect for burlesque farce. He seemed to have developed some amount of popularity in H-K but never made a big impression in the West. His best role was in Lau Kar-leung's EXECUTIONER OF SHAOLIN and DIRTY HO where he was once again paired with Gordon Liu, but he also starred or had major supporting roles in many minor comedic vehicles. After the closure of the Shaw Brothers studio, he remained a bit player for a while (he can be glimpsed briefly at the beginning of the classic ghost story ROUGE (87)) then left the movie business and when last heard actually worked as a street vendor in H-K

An attentive viewer can recognise a lot of faces while watching the movie: such as Lam Ching-ying, Meng Hoi, Chung Fat, Peter Chan Lung, Lee Ho-sai and Wilson Tong. It seems that Lau Kar-wing borrowed a lot of people from the Golden Harvest/Sammo Hung stunt crew. Mak Kar can also be briefly seen as a sheriff at the film's beginning. He had been the one who cast Lau Kar-wing as one of the leads in the watershed k-f spoof THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE LOSER (1976) and would do cameos in a good deal of Lau Kar-wing's k-f comedies. It's widely acknowledged that Lau Kar-wing also received some behind the scenes fight choreography help from his elder brother Lau Kar-leung who would actually always give a helping hand on many of his younger brother's early movies. Some bits of the fighting do indeed appear to be a lot sharper than the rest, particularly the Gordon/Lau Kar-wing fight as well as the final showdown.

HE HAS NOTHING BUT K-F is a give or take movie, depending on one's acceptance of Hong-Kong burlesque. If one considers this brand of humour just too dopey than he's better skipping this movie. On the other hand, if one wishes to explore k-f comedy beyond the more familiar territory of Sammo, Jackie and Yuen Woo-ping then HE HAS NOTHING...would be a very worthwhile film to pick. Not only for the laughs and thrills it provides of course but also as an introduction to one of k-f comedy's great under-appreciated stars: Wong Yu.

**He Walks Like a Tiger (Hong Kong, 1973: Kong Yee Hung)** - A man is jailed unfairly for his debts, so his son (rarely used actor Steve Yu Shung-Ying) takes up a job as a traveling medicine salesman / street performer to get him out. During his travels, he is killed in a confrontation with the son of a local kingpin. The son's kung fu school colleague, along with the grieving sister and love interest, come to town as more street performers in order to investigate and/or avenge his death. A local ally of the hero pretends to play both sides of the conflict.... You guys know the drill. Fun but short cameos from Hon Gwok Choi and Yuen Wah as acrobats. Also.... Someno Yukio doing the silliest dance I've ever seen and a 20ish min finale.

IT'S THE GREATEST BASHER MOVIE EVER MADE, PERIOD!!!! I've seen my fair share of Basher movies but this one takes it/breaks it/destroys it/breaks it again and leaving no competition left behind. Fucking amazing, that third act/ non stop action!!!! Two things why kung fu movies are easy to get behind:

1. characters you give a shit about
2. the amazing fight choreography

That's it. it's that simple. There's your kung fu movie.

**Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre (Hong Kong, 1978: Chor Yuan)** - Set during the Yuan Dynasty, it tells the fascinating story of the "Sacred Fire" sect, the Wu Tang swordsmanship clan, the disciples of the O Mei group, The Book of Chu Yang (which can make the reader immortal), and the destruction of Shaolin - complete with a killer cliffhanger. And that's just the start of the fascinating intrigues and ingratiating characters found here.

First off, this movie had me salivating over its purchase for the following reasons, the front cover displays a golden haired Lo Lieh which looks to cool, the title of the movie has a nice sound to it, and the fact that this movie is widely unknown, at least to the NON Die Hard collectors. It just had that mysterious sleeper hit look/sound/feel to it, which is why I purchased both this movie and its sequel at the same time.

Thankfully, at the beginning of this movie, a narrator describes what is going on, and what it is we are about to see. Without this pre-description, I can tell you this, it would of been a hard one to follow or try to just pick up on it at any given scene. This is a perfect example of a movie that needs repeated viewings to even attempt to grasp what is going on. While I was watching it, each scene with each set of characters seemed fine, I had no problems distinguishing the "good guys" to the "bad guys", or what was in fact taking place at that particular moment. It is trying to put together the movie as a whole that can be somewhat difficult with only one viewing. The plot of this movie is basically about 6 different clans all trying to obtain the "Dragon Sabre". The legend has it, that whomever obtains the "Dragon Sabre" would be the best of the best in the martial world. With that said, the movie doesn't come across as easy as it sounds, there is way more going on in this film, with tons of characters and names introduced, I found it a chore to retain all the information and developments that are thrown at you. Like I said before, multiple viewings is definitely recommended in order to try to make sense of everything you will see in the duration of this film. Please don't get me wrong and think that I did not like this movie, I in fact did like it, and I can't wait to watch part 2. I am just saying, while some may be able to pick up and follow a more complex plot in a movie, there are some that may need to watch this movie more then once to fully comprehend what is going on with all the different characters and story lines, someone like me!

Now, I have to point out that while this movie is not loaded with action, fight after fight, I was more then interested in finding out what was going to happen next, while at the same time enjoying the AMAZING looking sets in this movie. There was some obvious miniature models used in order to try to convey how massive a location or place was in the film. While the model thing was obvious, I have no complaints whatsoever of this, to me, it just adds that much more charm to the overall experience. Celestial really did an amazing job (as usual). While I have no old VHS tapes or previous versions to compare this newly remastered and restored version too, I can tell you that it really can not get much better then what Celestial has done with this film. Colors, picture, ratio all look perfect, and is a huge part of the enjoyment one can have while watching this movie.

The action in this movie is quite limited, but I do have to admit that when a scene came up that had all the "clans" represented, the action picked up and seemed like we would be treated to a non stop fight fest till the end of the movie, but when I checked how much time was left and realized it was only about half way, I knew this would not be the case. Prior to the meeting of the "clans", the action was shown mostly from a distance (long range camera shot), and lasted but a few seconds each time. As far as the quality of the action, it was not the fastest choreography I've seen, and certainly not the slowest, it fell somewhere in between, but fit perfectly with this type of film. Most of the action in this film involved swords, but I was pleasantly surprised that while the film progressed,

more hand to hand, or hand to sword fights were on display. Overall nothing you haven't seen before, with the exception of the "Chian Kuen Moving Technique"!

The blood flow in this movie was kept in order, meaning there wasn't all that much plasma gushing, spraying, bleeding, or oozing about. Just a touch of the red stuff here and there.

I know someone who WILL NOT get the most Standout Performance award for this movie, that would be Lo Lieh. Not because his acting ability sucked, or because his kung fu wasn't up to par, but because he was barely in the movie. He might have had about 2 minutes of total screen time, give or take a few seconds. It really just has me looking forward to watching part 2, I'm sure he will have a much bigger role in the sequel.

Without a doubt, my vote for Standout Performance has to go to the lead in the movie, Derek Yee. Derek had the most screen time, the most fight time, and pulled off the fights quite nicely, even though he was most likely doubled on the acrobatic maneuvers his character made when fighting, I just simply enjoyed his performance throughout the entire movie.

**Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber part 2 (Hong Kong, 1978: Chor Yuan)** – Okay, this is the conclusion to the narrative started in the previous film, both being adaptations of the Jin Yong novel of the same novel. Moreover, the film can also double as a follow-up of sorts to Jet Li's *Kung Fu Cult Master*, as that film ended on a cliffhanger and didn't make enough money at the box office to warrant a sequel. Most of the same characters are there, and I found myself referring to them as "Oh, it's Jet Li's character. As I've seen that movie and not this movie's immediate predecessor, I'll be unorthodox and treat this movie as a sequel to the Jet Li film in this commentary.

And that's Cheung Man's character." In a nutshell, Chang Wuqi (Chang Mo-Kei in Cantonese—played by Derek Yee here, Jet Li in the later film) is now the leader of the Ming Sect and, in the name of righteousness, goes to the Yuen (re: Mongolian) Princess (played by Cheung Man in the later film) to get the antidote to a kung fu-destroying poison that has been administered to the Six Clans (Shaolin, Ermei, Wah Shan, Wudong, and some others we don't care about). She gives it to him in exchange for a promise to do three things for her. While her wishes seem wicked on the outside, we discover that her intentions are more noble than we might expect otherwise. She already wields the Heaven Sword (the one that Nun No-Mercy wielded in KFCM) and now wants the Dragon Saber. That will bring us into contact with the Lion King (who showed up in the prologue of KFCM, and was frequently mentioned, but was missing in action otherwise).

The journey to the island where he resides will have some interesting consequences. First, it sees the exit of Wuqi's maid companion (played by Chingmy Yau in KFCM) from the narrative. That was sort of odd, since she was essentially his love interest in KFCM. But, it will put Wuqi into a sort-of relationship with the new head of the Ermei Clan (who was played by Gigi Lai in KFCM). That brings up one complaint I have about the story, in that Wuqi is portrayed as being sort of fickle with women. He just goes with the flow. He wants to shack up with the maid, but now that she's become a virginal higher-up in the Ming Sect, he'll have to settle for Ermei girl's panties instead. Oh wait, Yuen Princess doesn't want him to marry her? Very well then, perhaps he'll get some royal loving in the bargain. He never seems bothered by the fact that the girls in his life are exiting one by one (in different ways that aren't death, I should note). The movie ends with a sort of big climax at Shaolin. The Lion King settles a past debt with a corrupt monk (who showed up in a small role in KFCM and whose student was played by Cho Wing), while Wuqi, Yuen Princess, and Ermei Girl stand off with a trio of Shaolin supermonks before the final fight, where Ermei girl becomes the main antagonist. Yes, it's twisty and has far too many characters to keep track of, but as I've seen [i]Kung Fu Cult Master[/i] more than four times (the minimum to understand what's going on in that film), I was able to follow the story fairly well.

The action was surprisingly the weak link of the movie. There's a lot of it, with a lot of weapons (iron rings, supernatural blades, monk spades, jade poles, etc.) on display. There's also a lot of hand-to-hand action as well. But choreography, while competent, just feels sort of lacking. Comparing it to other films of the era, it lacks the technical authenticity of a Lau Kar-Leung film; the creative complexity of a *Venom Mob* film; the realistic intensity of a Sammo Hung film; and the aesthetic beauty of a Yuen Woo-Ping movie. The choreography feels on the par with a Taiwanese wuxia film of the same period, but hidden behind better production values. The action ends up being just sort of there.

**Heinous Fiend (Taiwan, 1974: Chen Shih Wei)** - The movie begins with the head of a village who sentences an evil villager to death, but his wife and their little girl beg him to let him go. Touched by her sorrow, the head of the village sentences the man to exile and he leaves.

Later, he meets a man, his wife and their boy and while the man has gone to change the wheel of his cart, the evil man rapes the woman and kills her, witnessed by the little boy. When the man returns, he chases him, they fight and the man is hurt and becomes a handicapped man.

Years later, the evil man is now a local boss, and his men bully a young girl (Sun Chia Lin) who fights them. They also bully two young men who are also good at fighting and the three of them are related to the handicapped man.

Later, we see the evil man's wife talking to her son and asking him to find his sister. The young man arrives in the same town where he lives his father and he fights with this one's men and his father (without knowing that he is his son) hires him to get rid of Sun Chia Lin. The two of them fight with each other and while he is about to kill her, he discovers that she has a scar on her neck and he tells her that he is her brother.

While the evil man learns that he is now on the side of the handicapped man, he goes with his men to this one's school and he recognizes the man he hurt years ago, while the handicapped man's son recognizes the man who raped and killed his mother and then, there is a big fight.

After a lot of fights, the young people try to kill the evil man and the handicapped man's son is killed and only the brother and the sister are still alive. When they are about to kill their own father (still without knowing that he is), this one is killed by his first lieutenant who has an affair with his wife and their mother appears and tell him that they are his children and the two of them chase the killers.

A superb non stop action movie, with a lot of twists and good fights. Sun Chia Lin is excellent and the movie is worth watching with confidence.

**Hell's Wind Staff (Hong Kong, 1979: Tony Liu, Tony Wong) - Dragon and Tiger Kids** - So I got this movie because of Hwang Jang Lee but there are a few other bonuses in this movie too. One is that you can see some of Corey Yuen's choreography from his old school period. Corey Yuen, who studied with Jackie Chan, is a great action director but too many of his movies made since the 1990s use too many special FX and now too much CGI, which is sad. This isn't to say that he's not still not a good choreographer, but his work today pales in comparison to his movies from the 1970s and 1980s.

There ended up being another special gift inside this package: Mang Hoi. Who's that? Well, Mang Hoi is a short, squat version of Yuen Biao who had supporting roles in a lot of action movies in the 1980s. You may remember him as Jackie Chan's best friend in *Heart of Dragon*, as the monk/acolyte in *Zu: Warriors from Magic Mountain*, or as Brandon Lee's arms dealer friend in *Legacy of Rage*. Most of his roles were secondary ones and he seemed relegated to playing comic sidekicks and such. Sometimes he'd fight, but he never had a tour-de-force like his more well-known colleagues Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung. However, he did work as a fight choreographer on a number of movies, his last one being Tsui Hark's masterpiece *The Blade*, for which he received a nomination for Best Action Design. Well, this movie is Mang Hoi's tour-de-force and I must say that he's an impressive fighter and an excellent acrobat.

Our movie begins with a certain Master Hsu (Tyrone Hsu) sending his students to chase after some guy. The guy, Tiao-Er, has just raped Master Hsu's sister-in-law or something and is now trying to get his uncle's protection. When his uncle finds out, he delivers Tiao-Er over to Master Hsu, who puts out one of his eyes.

A couple of years later, we find Tiao-Er's uncle having problem with his son, Xiao Hu (Mang Yuen-Man). The dad is trying to discipline his son and teach him kung fu, but Xiao Hu keeps on driving away his kung fu teachers and wasting time with his friend, Shi Hai Long (Mang Hoi). Hai Long's entrance is pretty cool, as we see him doing all sorts of acrobatics with one leg raised to avoid crushing the eggs glued to the bottom of the shoe. All this WHILE he's catching some chickens. When I took karate, my sensei never made us do that...although he did have us spar with one leg raised once, which wasn't easy.

After Xiao Hu's latest teacher leaves, a street performer/con artist/martial artist (I guess you have to be all three to make it in the Chinese movie world) is reluctantly brought in to teach and discipline Xiao Hu. Well, anyone who's seen *Drunken Master* can figure out what happens next. Well for starters, we can learn from this movie that the old laxative prank isn't a modern idea, but it goes back over a hundred years to China...at the very least. hehehe

While all that tomfoolery is going on, Tiao-Er is back and now he knows kung-fu pretty well. We find that he's hooked himself up with a local crime syndicate ran by Lu (Hwang Jang Lee), a master of the Devil's Stick technique. So they start extorting money from the local fisherman, beating the masses, and even massacre Master Hsu and his



school.

Eventually, Xiao Hu and Hai Long get tired of watching all this nonsense go on and decide to fight back. Their first target is a group of slave traders called the 4 Snakes, who are backed by Lu's syndicate. After a couple of fights, they manage to kill the leader of the group (in a grisly way I might add) and incur the wrath of Lu and Tiao-Er.

Tiao-Er and Lu respond by killing everyone at Xiao Hu's house, including Xiao Hu's dad and eventually, Xiao Hu's teacher. If you seen enough kung fu movies, you can already guess where this goes. Our heroes are going to learn some better kung fu from some other master, in this case it's Hai Long's sworn father, who coincidentally has a score to settle with Lu also. He teaches the two boys different styles: Rowing Oar and Dragon Hands, which when combined, can supposedly beat the Devil Stick technique. And yes, the former is a style based off the movements of rowing a boat...yes..."boat fu."

When Jackie Chan's Seasonal Films (*Snake in Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*) were huge box office successes, it opened the story to a lot of chop-sockey comedy movies. A lot of the movies seemed to run on essentially the same basic plotline, some goofball fighter gets into a lot trouble but ends up having to learn a new style to beat the bad guy for whatever reason. I don't think a lot of movies strayed from that mold on the whole. That's not too much of a problem, for without this popular formula we wouldn't have classics like *Knockabout* or *The Magnificent Butcher* or others that followed in the same mold. This movie follows in suit and storywise, is nothing that we haven't already seen.

Instead of channeling creative energy into the storyline, these movies tend to channel the creative energy into the fights and the styles used. You often get a lot of different martial arts styles on display, some of them real, others created for the sole purpose of the movie. For martial arts fans, this is a blessing. To those who don't have much understanding as a genre, this doesn't mean as much and probably comes across as repetitive, which is sad, since there's a lot more imaginative thinking going on than meets the idea, it's just expressed differently.

So if creativity of the martial arts is the true measure of these movies, you may ask how this one fares. Pretty good, actually. The fights in the movie are a wonderful blend of real kung fu styles (eagle's claw, crane, and snake), stylish acrobatics, weapons work (staff...natch!), some prop work, and in a lot of fights, a certain degree of humor. The grand finale is a much praised showdown between the two Mang's, Hwang Jang Lee, and Mang Hoi's sworn father. It goes on for nearly 10 minutes and heck, it may be an early peak for Corey Yuen's early career. Also on hand for the choreography is Yuen Shun-Yi (Yuen Woo-Ping's brother) and Tyrone Hsu, best known for his role in *Drunken Master* as the "King of Sticks" (he worked a lot with Yuen Woo-Ping in the old days).

The two main protagonists are really good in their roles. Mang Yuen-Man, in a role similar to Jackie Chan's Wong Fei-Hung in *Drunken Master*, lacks Chan's charisma but makes up for it in acrobatic skill. Mang Hoi still looks goofy but also fights great and too shows off agility that'd make the cast of *The Matrix* stare in sheer awe. The two are great individually and work even better as a pair, especially in the finale. For all those who've seen Mang Hoi as an annoying comic supporting character, this would be a good movie to watch him shine in.

This is a great movie to see Hwang Jang Lee's proficiency as a martial artist. In this movie, he does it all: weapons (he uses a metal pole for his Devil's Stick technique), handwork (like some of his other movies, he uses the Eagle's Claw), and his usual awesome Tae Kwon Do kicking. The guy is so talented that he's probably the only actor who can play a villain and constantly outperform, overshadow, and take attention away from the main good guys. One reviewer comments that he destroys everyone in a lot of his movies but then has to lose simply because he's the bad guy, and not because the good guy is actually capable of winning. While he has played alongside cult favorites like John Liu and mainstream favorites like Jackie Chan, in a lot of his movies, he gets top billing and is often the selling point of the movie. I don't believe that there's any typecast bad guy actor who such a great reputation. You can say that a movie is a "Hwang Jang Lee film" even though he's the bad guy and probably has limited fights in it. You can't say that about Ken Lo, Billy Chow, or Collin Chou (Ngai Sing), who are also good bad guys, but usually don't overshadow their opposites.

The movie isn't perfect and it has a few flaws. One liability to this movie is that I watched the subtitled version and not the dubbed. I prefer subtitled versions to newer movies and such, but with chopsockey classics, I prefer the dubs. When you're watching a kung fu comedy, the dubbing usually makes it all the more humorous and entertaining.

From a technical standpoint, the movie used a lot of freeze frames which after a while, got kind of annoying. It's alright for emphasis once in a while, but this movie goes overboard. Also, *Hell's Wind Staff* is awfully violent for its subgenre. I mean, this isn't Chang Cheh level stuff, but there's a lot more blood spitting and a higher body count than movies like *Drunken Master* and *Knockabout*.

*Hell's Wind Staff* was a critical and financial success which led to another pairing of Mang Hoi and Hwang Jang Lee: *Buddha Assassinator*. The movie will never win any awards for originality, as it's basically a remake of *Drunken Master* (like most were), but it does its job: provide us with a lot of cool fight scenes, prove that Hwang Jang Lee IS the man, and provide some amusing comic bits.

**Hero of the Heroes (Taiwan, 1968: Tsai Chiu-Lin)** - The story begins with two old men and their three disciples who arrive in a village and discover that the people are dying from hunger because of corrupted officials and they kill one of them who is conveying gold under the protection of Lei Ming, Su Chen Ping and their men, and the five of them are killed.

One of the old men's son (Tien Ming) arrives too late but his father has the time to tell him to go to another town in order to look for a Mr Chien, also known as Quick Sword. During his journey, he meets another man who is looking for Chien and they go together to meet him. However, when they meet the old man, he doesn't want to tell them that he is the man they look for and they have to leave. After learning that the two men and around ten friends are willing to rob the Ming's bad officer's gold in order to help the poor people, Chien's daughter (Lee Shu) decides to help them and they put up a plan to rob the gold and defeat Lei Ming and his soldiers.

After some of the friends are killed, Lee Shu, Tien Ming and a few other ones return to Chien's house and ask again for his help and he finally decides to go with them in order to stop the conveyors before they cross a bridge. There, they have to fight Su Chen Ping's teacher, who is an old enemy of Chien and they finally succeed in defeating the bad guys. As usual, Lei Ming and O Yau Man play very well their roles of villains. That's a very good movie. The only thing is that it's too bad that it's a black and white movie with white subtitles that are very often very difficult to read...

**Hero of the Time (Taiwan, 1979: Hsieh Kuang-Nan)** - aka **The Great Heroes** - I bought this title purely for the cover art (which looked cool) and the man Tan Tao Liang, one of the best kickers in kung fu movies. It can be a game of chance with these budget price flicks, as I'm sure many of you have found. Sometimes a classic will be uncovered, other times a total dud. This movie is one of the latter. In terms of plot I can't even remember the outline (it was that memorable) something to do with a lethal killer wearing cool straw hat headgear. Tan is his friend, and adds a small shade of class to the proceedings. However the fights are some of the most poorly choreographed I have seen in a seventies kung fu film, with lazy angles and low impact choreography. One scene also tries to emulate the Exorcist with subliminal images and a flying skull. This is actually the unintentionally hilarious highlight of the film. One to avoid.

**Hero of the Waterfront (Hong Kong, 1973: Wong Sing-Loy)** - Aka **Hero of Chiu Chow** - *Hero of the Waterfront's* main point of distinction is that it's the debut film of bootmaster Dorian Tan Tao-Liang. If not for that, it would be nothing but an inspired *Big Boss* rip-off with little to recommend it. Tan's physicality, while not used as creatively as it would be in some of his later films, is the film's sole saving grace.

Tan plays Kuan Chiang-Chow, a mariner/dock laborer (probably the former) who's about to get some long-term work on a British vessel. Things immediately take a downturn when the British shipping magnate cuts the workers' pay to 20 dollars a person, stating that Chinese lives are worth very little. Knowing that the workers will notice this when they receive their customary pay advances (which is what their families live on while they're away), the Chinese guy in charge of hiring the mariners (Mang Chiu-Fan) decides to not pay the advances in order to get them on the ship so they won't be able to complain when they get back.

This doesn't work. A riot quickly breaks out and some laborers are beaten before Kuan steps in and fights on their behalf. Thus starts a cycle in which the bosses claim that they'll pay, find some way to weasel out of it, try to ambush Kuan, and get the snot kicked out of them instead. About halfway through the film, the bosses stage a bloody ambush which results in Kuan's uncle and brother being murdered, not to mention his sister-and-law and her mother getting kidnapped. So Kuan goes on the offensive killing both mid-level managers (one of whom is played by Miao Tian) and then going for the boss. The boss tries to save his skin by offering Kuan a job as a manager. If he accepts, he may be able to do good for his fellow workers and help them out. If he doesn't, he may lose his life. Now, which option do you think will result in more facekicks, punches, bludgeonings with blunt objects, stabbings, shootings, snappings and breakings?

So this is very familiar stuff. Wong Sing-Loy, best known by me for directing *Angry Young Man*, one of the few old school movies I actively loathed, can't even be bothered to bring the exploitation film elements that Lo Wei brought to *The Big Boss*. There's an extra helping of weeping women and melodrama, but that gets old fairly fast.

The action is brought to you by Chan San-Yat, best known for being Chang Cheh's "transitional" choreographer after Lau Kar-Leung went his own way and before the Venom Mob era began. Chan worked on *The Shaolin Temple*; *Shaolin Avengers*; and *Grandmaster of Death*, among others. The other three choreographers didn't have anything resembling a career, at least not in film. Any protagonist who isn't Tan Tao-Liang gets brutalized without showing any skill, so the bulk of the film's MA content falls to Mr. Flashlegs himself. His kicks are quite good, especially by 1973 standards: high side kicks, fast front hook kicks, powerful spin kicks. Only Whang In-Sik and Bruce Lee were at his level at this point in the game. His hand techniques are pretty basic, but at least it's not mindless arm flailing. There's just not a lot of imagination thrown into the fights. Even when Tan goes to a foundry to fight one of the villains, Tan just swings back and forth on a rope, kicking people into molten steel. I was hoping for some pre-Drunken Master 2 fighting with hooks, bars and all sorts of tools, but no. I think the action directors' inexperience and the limitations of the basher genre kept Chan San-Yat and company from doing better fights in this movie.

Mang Chiu-Fan, who plays the main villain, does do some interesting deflecting techniques and palm-based strikes, which made me think of tai chi chuan. If that was the case, this would beat the Shaw Bros film *The Shadow Boxer* as the first film to showcase real tai chi onscreen.

Tan made an OK start here, but he would certainly go on to better things afterward.

**Hero Tattooed with Nine Dragons (Taiwan, 1977: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - Not sure how this was pulled off but director Pao Hsieh Li made his international film debut with this film. The reason I say that is because the titular character is based on the Tattooed Dragon character that was in both the *Water Margin* & *All Men are Brothers* which are Shaw Brothers movies. And to top it off, he was able to directed Chen Kuan Tai in this who also plays in both SB production films. Nonetheless, it must have been an easy way to break away from the SB machine with such familiarity between both director & actor. In fact, the two have worked together on 8 kung fu films in their career.

The story is about a young man Ta Lung who grew up wanting to learn kung fu against his father's wishes. After several years, his father gives in & begin bringing in different teachers to instruct them but Ta Lung beats them before he can learn anything from them. So he creates his own style & heads into town where he gets involved in a street tournament of sorts. Several people get killed in the process including the son of one of the town's big shots Mr. Kao (Shih Chung Tien). This ends up costing Ta Lung with deadly consequences. Saved from being killed, Ta Lung finally gets a teacher worthy of teaching him martial arts & what follows from there is Ta Lung out to dispense some justice. Also in this is Tsai Hung as one of Mr. Kao's associates & hired killers, Chia Ling & Shing Yung Peng as the wife & husband innkeepers & Ku Jeng as Ta Lung's ultimate kung fu teacher,

Chen Kuan Tai is almost always a sure bet when it comes to these types of films going from a guy who's a know-it-all but eventually gets humbled into learning kung fu. Although I've seen him in better roles, he sells himself as the Tattooed Dragon with very good skill. Shih Chung Tien was formidable as the villain which doesn't always come off which is weird given his vast catalog of films he's been in. Chia Ling was good enough in this although she shows up mid-film. Tsai Hung was his tough self as usual which he usually sells us on.

Overall, a very good effort. My only minor gripe is the prequel aspect. It seems like they indeed took the premise of the Tattooed Dragon & his origin, but the character's name are different from this film & the one given in the *Water Margin* saga. I'm sure one can easily explain it away as he could have changed his name to avoid being tied to the Ta Lung name in case of blow back from all the trouble he caused. It could just be a money grab by Pao Hsieh Li just to capitalize off the *Water Margin* success. Like I said, a minor gripe. Don't allow that to take away from this very good film. On its very own merits, it's a fine & very enjoyable kung fu flick so enjoy!

**Heroes of Sung (Hong Kong, 1971: Shen Chiang)** - One of the original ladies of the silver screen Shih Szu playing swordswoman Meng Hung must work with Fan Tien Fu played by Lo Lieh and his brother played by Chang Pei Shan. They must protect the royal seals of the Ming dynasty. If they should fail the dynasty will fall.

This movie was o.k. It really did not have much story, but really good action by Shih Szu who was tearing people up. She was slicing everyone apart. There was a lot of flying in this movie which I am not a big fan of, but I tolerated it. There is really not much more I could say because this movie is not the movie that could have me coming back many times.

The action is pretty good lead by Shih Szu who sliced about 5 guys while spinning in air. There was some blood from Chin Chun Iron Hand which ripped through people. There was also a scene where one guy gets sliced in two. Shih Szu [stands out] because of her aggressive fighting and some of her slick moves.

**Heroes of the Wild (Taiwan, 1977: William Cheung) - aka Heroes of Shaolin; Vingança e Honra** - The movie begins with a teenage boy flying a kite on the beach with his dad. Then it comes. Anyone who's watched a lot of kung fu movies knows what I'm talking about. It's that musical rift ripped off from *The Spy Who Loved Me* in the pyramids-Jaws scene. Almost always it's used to introduce some bad guy. The guy in this movie is Tu Ta-Shen (Chen Sing) and he's come to challenge the dad to a fight. They fight and Tu wins, causing the dad to commit suicide as a form of honor. However, before dying, the dad asks Tu to carry out a last request: bring to justice a traitor, Nan (Hwang Jang-Lee), who's begun siding with Qings in order to overthrow the Ming dynasty. Tu accepts and decides to take the man's teenage son with him, in order to train him for revenge.

Some time later, we find Tu and the son, Siao Hu, traveling along the countryside in capes and cone-shaped straw hats. They kind of look like wandering samurai, which isn't surprising, as this part of the storyline is vaguely reminiscent of the old *Lone Wolf and Cub* films. The two arrive in a town and Tu makes contact with some mysterious dude in a mask (the mask looks like the "Oni" mask that I saw in an old Sega game called *Black Belt*).

The resulting conversation teaches us that Tu is not only a martial artist, but an assassin as well. Actually, he's an assassin of the most dangerous type: if he doesn't agree the client's choice of who to knock off, he knocks off the client and takes their money. Makes me wonder how he'd get any business. I guess when you're dealing with the best, you're willing to take a few risks.

So the guy in the mask hires Tu to kill Nan as well, but tells him that he should go through Nan's colleague, Lui (Lo Lieh). Tu and Siao Hu challenge Lui to a duel, but Lui sends his effeminate student to meet them. Siao Hu takes the challenge but is beaten for his efforts. Tu nurses Siao Hu back to health and begins to train him further in kung fu.

Some time later, Tu and Siao Hu pay a visit to Lui and his gang. Siao Hu has a rematch with the rather delicate student, who gets his hind parts handed to him on a silver platter. Tu does the same thing to Lui, but ends up getting injured when Lui pulls some dirty tricks on him.

Tu and his young follower reverse roles as Siao Hu now has to nurse Tu back to health. By then, Nan has found out about Tu's plans to defeat him and sends his two grandsons (Corey Yuen and Yuen Biao) to finish him off...but they too get whooped. To add insult to injury, those two came in armed with weapons that pierce and slash and they still couldn't beat an unarmed Tu. But don't worry, the fight itself is quite a sight to behold and is a good example of the high-quality weapons fighting in this movie.

Making it to yet another town, Tu has a little interlude at a brothel where he runs into Nan's granddaughter, Mei Mei (Lung Jun-Erh). Fortunately, the only behind she's interested is Tu's...and that's because she wants to kick it. Well, she doesn't.

By this time, Nan is ready to duel with Tu. And they do. However, this time Tu gets to learn the lesson of what happens whenever you try to step to Hwang Jang-Lee, especially before the climatic fight: You get whooped. Hwang Jang-Lee is one of those guys whom you do not want to fight, especially if you're not the main hero. Because if you aren't, chances are that your number is up. Yup, you don't stand a chance against Hwang. Hwang will destroy you. Even if you're the main hero, oftentimes you need a partner to beat Hwang. And sometimes, that's just not enough.

All this accounts for about two-thirds of the movie. There are a lot more fights after this one as the film builds to its climax. But even the synopsis skips the subplots dealing with Tu's relationship with Siao Hu and another subplot dealing with Tu and a woman sold into prostitution.

This is one of the movies in which the plot plays an important part in the film and one of the few old school movies that I've seen where character relationships play an important role in pushing the story forward. This isn't to say that the movie has to sacrifice fights for character development; the movie has a healthy balance of both.

The character development is spurred by the relationship between Tu Ta-Shen and Siao Hu. Siao Hu begins the film with nothing but hatred and contempt for Tu Ta-Shen but as the film progresses, he learns to channel his hatred and develops a certain degree of respect for his rival. This comes to a climax shortly after Tu's first duel with Nan. Siao Hu's development as a character is found not only on the personal side, but on the martial arts side. Siao Hu starts off the film as a whiny kid who can barely swing a pole. As the film progresses, his fighting skills gradually improve. Unlike other films, where the kid is a kung fu master after one simple training montage, Siao Hu's growth

is more realistic. At the last reel of the film, we learn to what extent his skills have truly developed.

Tu Ta-Shen's character is just as memorable as Siao Hu's. He's a man of honor and principle. He works as an assassin, but has a personal code which prevents him from killing those of honor and integrity. Also beneath his violent exterior is a certain degree of tenderness, as demonstrated by the affection he learns to feel for Siao Hu, who should be his rival, and for the aforementioned prostitute. What's interesting is that the character is played by Chen Sing, who seems to be one of the great perennial villains of the old school. The only other movie I saw him in was Jackie Chan's *New Fist of Fury*, where he the dastardly Japanese villain. His character reminded me of Tomisabaru Wakayama's character from *Shogun Assassin*, who too was a violent man with an affectionate and at times, merciful interior.

Villainy is provided by Hwang Jang-Lee and company. One review I read of this film said that this was Hwang "at his white-haired nastiest." I think that's a bit of an overstatement, as he was far more evil in movies like *Invincible Armor* and *Secret Rivals II*. Actually, his character is fairly restrained in this one. He's supposed to be a traitor the Mings, but his character is far more interested in being a champion than in any political machination. We learn the reason for this seemingly inconsistent behavior at the climax.

In addition to our man Hwang, supporting villains are played by Lo Lieh, Lung Jun-Erh, Yuen Biao, and Corey Yuen. All four of them do a good job with their roles and the film's choreographers (the two Yuens) provide everyone with a good showcase of his or her talents. This movie has a certain reputation for being one of the few movies that Lung Jun-Erh made. I guess she was supposed to be one of great fighting females but her career quickly dwindled because of emotional instability. So for you fans of fighting females, you should be happy to know that she gets about four fight scenes in this movie.

I want to note that Corey Yuen, who helmed the choreography alongside Yuen Biao, gets to fight in front of the camera. I say this because most people (fans of the genre) know him to more of a director and choreographer than an actor. He's worked on some of the best action films of the 1980s, more than half of Jet Li's filmography, and a bunch of other movies over the years. He's a creative choreographer and such, so with that in mind, it's refreshing to see him fighting in front of the camera just as much as directing behind it. Actually, he's had supporting villain roles in about four Hwang Jang Lee movies that I've seen, including *Invincible Armor* and *Dance of the Drunk Mantis*. Now I just need to see Yuen Woo-Ping and Ching Siu-Tung fight in a movie and I'll be satisfied.

The two Yuens to a great job of choreographing the plentiful fights. The style of choreography is characteristic of the era, an intricate combination of real kung fu styles and some acrobatics (probably provided by the Yuens as well). In a lot of movies, the players can take a lot of blows during a fight and still keep on going. Here, the power of the hits is emphasized and the actors aren't able to take as much punishment. This helps give the fights a slightly more realistic flavor, which is refreshing.

For you purists out there, you should be glad to know that there's a lot to see in this movie. Chen Sing uses his infamous tiger style while Hwang Jang-Lee uses the Eagle's claw/tae kwon do combination that he uses in a lot of other movies. The kid who plays Siao Hu uses a combination of the praying mantis style and the tiger style, which is cool.

There's also a lot of weapons work in this movie. Actually, the weapons work is some of the best that I've seen and ranks alongside Lau Kar-Leung's *Shaolin Challenges Ninja* in variety and quality. Hwang, showing his versatility, fights with a big horse blade (that weapon that looks like it's 50% handle and 50% large blade) and looks great. Also seen are the double sai swords, pole, three-sectional staff, spear-tipped batons, sword and tonfa, and the shuang dao (that sword that "miraculously" splits into two swords). It's all great stuff.

Fans of Hwang Jang-Lee shouldn't be disappointed with his performance in this movie. He once again shows us that he can fight with his hands and with weapons just as well as he can kick. His kicking is good in this movie, although not as over-the-top as it is in some of his other movies. However, it's still used to good effect and depicted with a large amount of power.

As far as novelty value is concerned, seeing Chen Sing and Hwang Jang-Lee go at it is kind of novel. It's like a duel between the great villains of the martial arts genre. I'm not sure how often something like this happens. The only other time I can think of is when Billy Chow and Ken Lo went at it in *Kickboxer's Tears*, although I haven't seen that yet.

The movie isn't necessarily funny, but it has the usual "but still," dubbing and stock James Bond music to give it a feeling of nostalgia. One thing's for sure, I'll take music ripped off from old James Bond movies before I'll take the rap that they put in a lot of Jet Li movies these days.

I highly recommend this movie. It's an excellent film with great characters to compliment great fight scenes. Or is it vice-versa? That doesn't matter. What matters is that when you watch this movie, you'll not only get a showcase for about seven famous martial arts performers, but you get a compelling story to go along with it. If that's not enough for you, I don't know what is.

**Heroes of the East (Hong Kong, 1978: Lau Kar-Leung) – aka Shaolin Challenges Ninja** - Ah To played by Gordon Liu is married to his Japanese bride. In the aftermath of the marriage he realizes his new wife still practices many of her Japanese rituals and traditions. Tempers flare over whether Chinese or Japanese martial arts are better and results in his wife fleeing back to Japan. Ah To tries to goad her into returning by issuing her a challenge. The challenge turns into wrong hands in the form of a ninja master and he travels to China with a number of martial arts masters to battle Ah To. From there on it's an all out kung fu battle for honor.

first noticeable thing about "Heroes Of The East" (besides Gordon Liu's full head of hair) is that the production value just seems better than many standard kung fu affairs. The sets may have painted on clouds and such but they just seem crisper and more colorful. Even the cinematography has some very interesting shots including long, wide fight angles.

The movie itself is superb. The tale, while simple, really tends to delve into Chinese versus Japanese sensibilities. What begins as an arrogant testament to Chinese kung fu becomes a compelling story of virtue and honor.

Liu shines as Ah to, a man recently married to a Japanese woman. They go head to head when he finds she still holds dear some of her Japanese traditions including the practicing of martial arts.

The film's pace is perfect. The quarrels between the newlyweds serve as some light hearted banter between some of the more ferocious exchanges. Of course once the challenge is issued and the Japanese martial arts masters travel to China to fight Ah To things simply get better.

What more do you want from a movie than sword, spear, sai, tonfa, nunchaku and three sectioned staff fighting as well as judo, ninja skills, crane fist and drunken boxing? Could you really want more? You could? Well how about a fleeting performance by Yuen Siu Tien and a cameo by director Lau Kar Leung as Siu Tien's usual character of the drunken beggar?

By no means is this film meant to degrade the Japanese as each fighter holds their own when fighting. Of course Shoji Kurata puts in an excellent turn as the "ninja master" and the final duel is incredibly versatile. Even the ridiculous looking Japanese crab fist is something to behold.

"Shaolin Challenges Ninja" is much celebrated and I understand why. Where many have tried, none have reached the heights of its ambition. A Shaw Brothers classic at the top of many a list, it diverts from traditional revenge-centered plot lines and even updates the era. The fight choreography, while not as mind numbingly insane as some kung fu classics, is both stylish and relatively true to the forms it portrays. Viewing Liu's superb Wudan sword skills, drunken boxing and crane fists (not to mention his superb control of the three section staff) is what makes this an action classic. It may not be brutal, bloody action like many of Chang Cheh's outings and it may not be as slapstick and ballistic as Yuen Woo Ping's efforts but Lau Kar Leung pulled in the reins and directed a tight, hard hitting gem in this Shaw Brothers masterpiece.

**Heroes of the Late Ming Dynasty (Taiwan, 1975: Wu Min-Hsiung)** - Eunuch Ah Wei the Commander of the Imperial Guard (Carter Wong) had requested the help of the Manchu army to help strengthen his current position. However, General Hsiung (Pai Ying) who is in charge of all military operations at the border had intercepted the troops from entering the region. This does not go down well with the Eunuch who issues a false imperial decree for the arrest of General Hsiung on some trump misconduct charges. The problem lies in the fact that if the prosecution fails, then the Eunuch would be in deep trouble, so a plan is hatched to assassinate General Hsiung while he is being escorted to the town where he is to stand trial. Second in command Chang Chun (Tien Peng) joins the procession to ensure the safety of General Hsiung, as does Chien Ying (Polly Kuan) who is the General's daughter. The General assures the pair that he will be sure to receive fair judgement in the court but it seems as though Eunuch Ah Wei has other plans for him...

'Heroes of the Late Ming Dynasty' is a pretty solid effort with a very reliable cast and while it's not exactly a classic, it rarely puts a foot wrong on offering no thrills entertainment. The only slight let down is the quality of the fight scenes, which I felt were lacking any sort of urgency considering the players involved. The best moment comes in the end fight where Polly Kuan knocks off the Eunuch's hat with her sword, the build up to it is a definite rewind moment, and those who have seen the film will know what I'm referring to here.

Courtroom scenes in a martial arts film always run the danger of grinding the film to a halt but here they are expertly handled and also provide Carter Wong with the opportunity to make the most out of his trademark icy glare. One of the most enjoyable sections of the film is where Hsien Chun (Han Ying Chieh) and his Imperial Guard set up their base in a teahouse – very much in the vein of 'The Fate of Lee Khan'. Their efforts of desperately trying to keep a low profile are thwarted by Polly Kuan who turns up to antagonise them by throwing various items of cutlery at them until they snap and attack her!.

The rest of the cast are all familiar faces such as Shan Mao, another weasel role for Wei Ping Ao, Tien Ho who plays Inspector Cheng and also Barry Chan was lurking in there too somewhere. 'Heroes of the Late Ming Dynasty' is decent enough production and definitely gets my recommendation if you're looking for a more drama weighted Kung Fu film with some good performances.

**Heroes Two (Taiwan, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - One of my favorite Chang Cheh films, and my favorite of his "Shaolin Cycle.". The story is simple, but moves fast with a good sense of urgency and some decent enough acting. It starts as man on the run plot with Hung Shi Kuan (Chen Kuan Tai) on the run from the Manchus, and ends up as a prison break story with Fung Shi Yu (Fu Sheng) and a group of rebels trying to free him.

The action is brilliant and in my opinion some of the best of its time. The choreography is some of the most hard hitting shapes you will ever see, but at the same type beautifully fluent and complex. There is a good emphasis on the hand forms as to display the style of Hung Gar well, but it is done in way where it is just part of the action. (Its not like many other classic movies where it almost breaks up the action to stress the style/form). I really cant describe how much I love the action in this movie. While it lacks a good villain, Chen Kuan Tai and Alexander Fu Sheng both put on what is probably their best fighting performance I have seen. Both actors put on a very explosive performance, and Alexander Fu Sheng is usually the polar opposite of explosive in action scenes. My favorite action in the film is the few scenes where Chen Kuan Tai is just bulldozing his enemies, it is well choreographed and looks legitimately painful; He twists their arms around as he socks them in the face, and just keeps moving. The finale is pretty good but sadly not as good as those scenes with CKT or Fu Sheng just mowing through people earlier in the film. For one, it actually doesn't feature Fu Sheng and Chen Kuan Tai as much, and there is also a whole lot of extras standing around doing nothing; It does feature the best use of Chang Chehs color filter he liked to experiment with at this time though. My favorite one on one fight of the film was when Chen Kuan Tai and Fu Sheng fought each other, and I wish it had lasted longer. It could possibly be the best fight of either actors career.

While I talked about the choreography a fair amount, I haven't mentioned that it was framed and shot brilliantly adding to the great action. Many different angles/ranges are used as well as moving cameras and it supplements the choreography to great effect. The movie of course features the typical mix of locations/sets Shaws of this time often did, which I prefer to the more set heavy look of later times(though I like them too).

Anyway, if you are looking for a fair review of Heroes Two, look elsewhere. I love this movie, and that hasn't changed it all after another viewing. Career high performances from Chen Kuan Tai and Fu Sheng, coupled with brilliant action direction and an overall breakneck pace make this one of my favorite movies. It is a shame that Chen Kuan Tai didn't get a bigger role the other times he worked with this crew, as he really shines here. I want to watch it again already.

As much as I love Lau Kar Leung, in 77' when he made Executioners from Shaolin, it seems he didn't yet know how to make the best of Chen Kuan Tais talents. I am sure some may call that blasphemy, but when I see Heroes Two where they worked with Tong Gaii and Chang Cheh years earlier, there is no comparison. The action here is far and away superior to that which is seen in Executioners from Shaolin.

**Heroic Ones, The (Hong Kong, 1970: Chang Cheh)** - This Chang Cheh film is set in the later years of the Tang Dynasty at a time when the Tang and their supporters were fighting rebellious bandits to keep their power (a narration with an on-screen text at the beginning of the film explains it better, but that's what I gathered). The movie focuses on a warlord (Ku Feng) working for the Tang and his 13 generals, who are really his sons (these include Lo Wei, Lau Kar Wing, Ti Lung and David Chiang). The movie essentially sees the Tang at war against the bandits trying to conquer places (notably a city where David Chiang meets a woman played by Lily Li), the way

things go aren't to please a pair of generals who constantly cause trouble by disobeying orders and ultimately refuse the leadership of the Thirteenth brother, which leads to big tensions and ultimately to the 13 brothers' going at war against each others.

This film is known notably for the graphic death of David Chiang (seriously, it's very messy) and while my summary may give away on the plot, I think knowing that the plot was essentially about brothers betraying each others may have avoided some disappointment when I first saw the movie - yeah, I expected this to be a period piece where our heroes would battle and death would strike during a battle against enemies, not between each others. That said, the film is otherwise good. It has nice sets, though I can't help but wonder if the same castle set was used for the various forts seen. The characters are also very solid: Ku Feng is great as the warlord and for once he's a good guy. The villains - a villainous general opposing the Tangs and the two treacherous brothers - are also interesting, though the brothers feel a bit like jealous cry-babies and this type of character feels a bit *deja vu* - from Hamlet's uncle to Scar in Disney's *The Lion King* (the Disney film is more or less an adaptation of Shakespeare's play TBH), there's nothing new with this type of character, they even explicitly explain being jealous at a point (mentioning that Chiang is apparently an adopted child while they are Ku Feng's natural children). I revisited the movie for a review on kungfucinema (which I'm posting here, though I'm keeping it more general), and the element I remembered the best before that was David Chiang's character - he's extraordinary in how perfect he seems at first: skilled fighter, inspiring leader, cunning tactician and also fair in his judgement and not just some blind blood-thirsty killer - referring to the scene where he wanders through a conquered city looking for a civilian (Lily Li) he had met earlier in a undercover mission and ultimately finds she's gone and her house has been destroyed in the battle.

The action is nice too (several different weapons are used, and some creative fighting happens in the last third), but the film was choreographed by Lau Kar Liang and Lau Kar Wing (who plays one of the very underused brothers - actually, except for the two traitors, David Chiang and Ti Lung, the others seem here mainly to make the movie look more crowded although the final battle showcases them all).

Revisiting it, I found it MUCH better than I initially did - went up a notch in my Shaw Bros ranking. It's really a very solid Shaw Bros film, and it looks great too in terms of cinematography (I love the costumes the generals wear notably, but the rest - sets, acting, props... - is very solid too).

**Heroine (Taiwan, 1975: Yeung Jing Chan)** - Polly Kuan is Shao Ling who is constantly getting up to mischief with her two friends. Whether it be attempting to fix cars at the garage or stealing money to buy groceries for their poorly master, the trio can't seem to do anything right!. Pressure from some local thugs to cough up \$200 forces Shao Ling to go out pick-pocketing. This time her victim is local Kung Fu instructor Lo Chi (Chang Yi), who challenges her and eventually gets his wallet back. The two strike up an initially platonic friendship but Lo Chi's jealous and hot headed fiancé Dolly, is convinced that he is having an affair! Meanwhile, Mr Tsai has hired Lo Chi and his cousin to look for his long lost daughter "Chiao Ying" whose background sounds remarkably similar to that of Shao Ling's...

More complications arise when Mau Mau - Polly's friend - is captured by the gang of thugs. Shao Ling calls Lo Chi for help and soon the two are off to infiltrate the bad guy's mansion which has just been made a more difficult task by the arrival of a man called Mr. Tu whose speciality is the Iron Finger technique.

'Heroine' opens with a (hopefully tongue-in-cheek) soft focus, romantic dance between Chang Yi and Polly Kuan which instantly confirms the light hearted tone of the film - this is essentially a basher with a heavy dose comedy. All of the staple traits of slapstick are present here - sped up fight sequences, little kids beating grown men and the most risible of them all - the classic, bad-guys-falling-into-the-swimming-pool scene, yes! It's all here and it's all very unfunny. Thankfully, Chang Yi doesn't participate in too much of the buffoonery and escapes the film with most of his dignity intact. He does however look slightly uncomfortable by it all, unlike Polly Kuan who arguably built up her repertoire with these Kung Fu comedies and appears to be lapping up every second of screen time here.

Still, I shouldn't be too harsh because as comedies go, there is a hell of a lot worse out there and to be honest, I actually quite enjoyed this film by the end!. Polly Kuan looks as cool here as she did in 'Seven To One' and when she's not fooling around with the bad guys, she does actually get to unleash some decent kicks in a few of the fights (especially the end one). It was an unusual sight to see Chang Yi wearing some garish 70's fashions and although I feel he is suited to the more traditional roles, he too got some very nice kicks in and lent a bit more credibility and impact to some of the fight scenes.



If you are a Polly Kuan or Chang Yi fan/completist, then I would say that it's worth checking this one out if you think you can put up with the comedy. Myself, I'm a fan of 70's fashions and music, so I still found plenty to admire here (there are lots of funky Shaft-esque snippets in the soundtrack) but please don't be fooled by thinking this is a hardcore basher because Chang Yi is in it – this is purely light entertainment and therefore cannot be recommended to everyone.

**Heroine Kan Lien Chu (Taiwan, 1976: Hou Cheng)** - Yu Tien Lung (Kuei Wu) leads a group of heroes who are members of the Kuan Hua Associates. Their master is being held captive at the Red Lotus Temple which has been seized and over run by the Chings - headed by the formidable White Haired Fox 'Ao Pai' (Yee Yuen). The Fox manages to acquire a list of names of Kuan Hua Associates and despatches troop after troop of Ching guards to destroy them. The temple itself proves to be no easy task to penetrate and after a failed rescue mission attempt, more complications arise when Kuei Wu gets married to Polly Kuan (Lian Chu) whose father turns out to be in league with the Chings!.

I was very surprised at just how good 'Heroine Kan Lien Chu' was - I'd even go as far to call it a minor classic! The film sports a great ensemble cast of Polly Kuan, Judy Lee, Yu Tien Lung, Beardy, Phillip Kao Fei and Yee Yuen as the Fox who, unfortunately, was sorely under utilised in his role (and that's my only complaint of the film). Combat is predominantly restricted to swordplay but it's the kind that I love with loads of secret and inventive weaponry - for example towards the end of the film, each of the heroes have to square off with one of the 'Four Lamas' (Yee Yuen's top fighters) and each Lama has their own special weapon. Beardy uses a ring (with blades on the inside like the flying guillotines) against Polly Kuan and to help protect her from the blades she presses a button on her belt which flicks up metal collars stopping the ring from piercing her throat! Phillip Kao Fei also wears some nasty looking Clawed Gloves in his fight against Yu Tien Lung.

There are various other fun characters like the statues that come to life in the temple, one wielding what looks like a fire breathing cuddly toy snake...Judy Lee has a small but important role as Hung Kun, a member of the Associates, who is an expert at 'Light Kung Fu'. This proves to be a vital when the heroes have to traverse a treacherous bridge with the Ching Guards in full chase right behind them. Just one of the many exciting and atmospheric scenes that the film has to offer.

'Heroine Kan Lian Chu' has got something for everyone. A White Haired Fox who has mastered the Invincible Armour technique, 2 top leading ladies amongst a great cast of favourites and enough inventive weapons and action to keep things interesting. Highly recommended and a worthwhile purchase for anyone.

**Heroine of Tribulation (Taiwan, 1981: Hou Cheng)** - aka **Sea Dragon Goddess; One-Armed Yeo Shin-Yong** - The film opens with the execution of Master Fan who refuses to sign a declaration of Tan Tao Liang's evil Eunuch character. Upon learning of her master Fan's death, Ah Larn (Polly Kuan) is entrusted with his son, Shou Hau and is instructed to take him to a secret island where an old ally of Fan's awaits. Ah Larn and Shou Hau set off for the island but are tracked down by Tan Tao's men almost immediately. Polly Kuan loses an eye and an arm in the battle and also ends up separating from little Shou Hau who drifts off downstream and out of sight...Contemplating suicide - Ah Larn is saved by Alan Lau's mysterious one-armed character, who then teaches Polly how to fight with this handicap. With her skills but up to par again, Ah Larn sets off to find Shou Hau...but the Emperor's men are tracking her all the way.

Heroine Of Tribulation is mainly notable for the novelty of having Tan Tao Liang play a fox which he does with great flair and menace. However he is only really seen in the last 15 minutes of the film and although he is certainly a devastating opponent, viewers are left aching to see more of his character - I felt he was a little too under used for my liking.

I quite liked the 4 foxes that worked as Tan Tao's sidekicks the Tiger, Leopard, Serpent and Hawk - again I would have liked to have seen more of these guys especially the Serpent. (and for all Lung Fei fans - he plays the Tiger who wears a convincing disguise on later on in the film).

There are a couple of bumbling, comic relief characters who latch onto Polly Kuan halfway through the film but they aren't too annoying and even prove to be quite useful.

Polly Kuan does a good job in her role but doesn't appear to be as charismatic as her usual self. It was quite cool to see her one armed swordsmanship though.

I thought that the film bore a striking similarity in plot and structure to Evil Karate - though with the main leads reversed e.g. whereas the little girl was entrusted to the male lead in Evil Karate - Polly Kuan has to protect the young boy in this film.

Polly Kuan's character also reminded me of the 1974 Swedish film 'Thriller/They Call Her One Eye' which also features a woman donning an eye patch and heading out for revenge after being disfigured.

The middle section of the film is plagued by some risible and frequent Canto-Pop which may be off putting to some viewers but this is dispensed with after about the 40 minute mark and from there on it's pretty solid all the way.

I'm definitely glad to have seen this film as a Polly Kuan fan. Without FLK I doubt I'd have ever been able to. Even though it lacks any really memorable fight scenes, I'd still strongly urge any Polly Kuan, Tan Tao Liang or Fox fans to check this one out and I feel it is a film that will be even more rewarding upon further viewings.

**Heroine Susan, The Sister Of The Shantung Boxer (Taiwan, 1973: Wong Hung-Cheung)** - While the connection to Chang Cheh's Boxer From Shantung is there according to reports, Heroine Susan, The Sister Of The Shantung Boxer can be judged on its merits thankfully. Lacking in much merits however, at hand is revenge for a fallen brother by a sister (Wang Ping). Target: the axe gang and a drugs operation. Grit and fighting fury does rear its head but far too infrequently and most of the action comes off as devoid of power. Igniting a little towards the end with select sections of Chang Cheh-esque gore as Wang Ping fights alongside Charlie Chin, it's hard for the movie to walk away with its head up high after being so decidedly normal and weak before. Also with Suen Yuet.

**Hidden Hero (Hong Kong, 1990: Chang Cheh)** - It seems appropriate that one of the last films from legendary Chang Cheh last would be a collection of elements from his prior Shaw Brother's flicks but it's a rather failed best-of-collection that barely touches upon the excellent character-skills the Chang Cheh of the late 60s and early 70s possessed. The career trajectory was indeed quite notable/bizarre in that regard but clearly Chang found the combination of plastic heroes and bloodshed to his liking in his latter filmmaking life. While low-budget and utilizing quite embarrassingly empty, large scale sets, Hidden Hero is not unlike what Shaw's did turn out. Therefore we get an oversized character gallery, endless talking, plotting and backstabbing. All later interspersed with fairly lively bursts of martial arts that echoes weapons- and gore elements of past flicks. But it's an art that was dying and the screen results are very watered down. When Chang Cheh lets preferred leading man of this era, Tung Chi-Wa speak of the corrupt evil of our world, proceedings also turn corny beyond belief. Still, with a legacy left behind with classics such as One-Armed Swordsman and Blood Brothers, any amount of bad genre filmmaking won't be able to shake the foundation.

**Hidden Power of Dragon Sabre (Hong Kong, 1984: Chor Yuen)** - I haven't watched yet "heaven sword and dragon sabre1&2" but I believe this is direct sequel...Through potting villain manages to get Sword&Sabre and some special powers and it's Derek Yee and Ti Lung who has mission to stop him. I have feeling liked this bit more years ago than now. It's still good Chu Yuan movie with easy to follow plot, some good fights with swords and unarmed. However massive emphasis on f/x bothered me little bit. There is heavy amount of explosions, lights, energy blasts and wires. I did not remember that, so maybe wrong occasion to revisit it now after viewed excellent old skool "golden knight" earlier today..However for friends of new wave martial art flicks if enjoyed sth like "zu warriors from magic mountain, it's very recommendable viewing". Derek Yee was better in "death duel" but Ti Lung has really good role as "mongolian hawk".

**Himalayan, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Huang Feng)** - Most reviews of The Himalayan place the film among Angela Mao's better, but not the best, films. We'll get into that reason following the plot synopsis. There is one reviewer, the man who ran the "The Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films" website (which sadly hasn't been updated in five years), who gave this film a 5/5 and called it one of the greatest martial arts films of all times. I understand why he says it, although my main beef with this film, which reflects what a lot of others say, prevents it from reach such lofty ground.

The movie proper begins with a voiceover narration talking about the difference between Buddhist martial arts in China, as represented by Shaolin kung fu, and those in Tibet/Nepal, as represented by the "Mi" style. It has been

stated that the “Mi” in question refers to the Mi-Tsung Fist Style, which is associated with the Jing Wu academy and shows up in films like *Fist of Legend*. It’s not really that important, to be perfectly honest, since the two protagonists were not trained in the mi-tsung style and choreographers Sammo Hung and Han Ying-Chieh couldn’t really be bothered to try to depict it accurately. It almost makes me wonder why they even bothered in the first place.

We’re quickly introduced to Kao Chu (Chen Sing, *The Shanghai 13* and *Heroes of the Wild*) and his adopted brother, Kao I-Fan (Ling Hon, whose filmography is made up of adult movies produced by Golden Harvest) riding through the Himalayas on their way to a manor belonging to the Chang clan. Kao Chu has arranged for I-Fan to marry Ching Lan (Angela Mao, *Lady Whirlwind* and *When Tae Kwon Do Strikes*), the daughter of the Chang family patriarch. After a big Tibetan festival, complete with singing, dancing, and a brief display of kung fu between I-Fan and Ching Lan, the marriage date is set. Unfortunately, I-Fan is less than willing to marry Ching Lan, although it has more to do with his being against arranged marriages than Ching’s appearance, as Angela has rarely been more lovely than she is in this movie.

Kao Chu, however, won’t put up with his brother’s sudden sentimentality. You see, Kao is more interested in the Chang family’s riches than his brother’s well-being. Said greediness on his part is now threatened. That is, until, he finds a fellow attending the festival that happens to look just like Kao I-Fan, minus a birth mark on his head. So Kao Chu arranges for some flunkies to ambush both him and his brother and then kills his I-Fan during the resulting fight. He then is able to convince village boy to assume his brother’s identity and marry Ching Lan (despite the fact that counterfeit I-Fan is married and has a baby child).

The marriage goes forth (during ceremony, keep an eye out for a young pre-fame Jackie Chan, who shows up in two scenes standing behind Han Ying-Chieh), much to the dismay of Chin Kang (Dorian Tan Tao-Liang, *The Leg Fighters* and *Snake and Crane Secret*), the Chang Family stable boy. Chin loves Ching Lan, but class differences keep them apart. Kao Chu takes notice of this and, after giving Chin a humiliating beating, arranges for the slutty maidservant, Man (Angela Wang, *Gonna Get You*) to seduce Chin.

Meanwhile, counterfeit I-Fan and Ching Lan are starting to grow on each other while Kao Chu slowly wins the favor of Ching Lan’s father, even if Uncle Chu (Han Ying-Chieh, *A Touch of Zen* and *Duel of the Seven Tigers*) doesn’t completely trust him. Soon it’s time to strike. Kao Chu attacks Ching Lan and renders her both unconscious and (when she wakes up) speechless. After hiding her body, both he and I-Fan accuse her of being a cheap adulteress. Patriarch Chang and Uncle Chu find Chin Kang and Man, who’s dressed as Ching Lan, enjoying each other’s company in a stable. Man flees before the men see her face, so they naturally assume that Ching Lan was having an affair with the stable boy. Chin Kang is almost beaten to death by Kao Chu, although his father gets him off the hook and he’s able to flee. Kao Chu then kills I-Fan and puts the murder weapon in the hand of a now-dazed Ching Lan, who is sentenced to death for her supposed treachery.

Luckily for Ching Lan, the Tibetans utilize a highly inefficient capital punishment method, namely, the person is tied to a raft and sent downriver. Yeah, nothing could possibly go wrong with that. Chin Kang, who has been more or less following Ching Lan, is able to rescue her. A visit to the falsified I-Fan’s village reveals that the bastard was already married and soon our two heroes are off to the nearest Buddhist temple to learn the kung fu skills they need to defeat Kao Chu and his tiger claw technique. Meanwhile, Kao Chu is busy killing off everybody around him whom he perceives as being a threat to his plans. By the time we reach the end of the movie, there’s really not going to be anybody left.

Despite the top billing being given to Angela Mao and Dorian Tan, Chen Sing is really the main star here. His Kao Chu character becomes one of the great villains of kung fu cinema through a combination of superior kung fu kills (Chen’s tiger claw has never looked as deadly than it does here) and just good acting. Chen Sing oozes sleazy villain at every turn, whether its concocting lies, brutalizing anybody who gets in his way, or even screwing the slutty maidservant (although in her case, both the second and third items apply to her). His tiger claw style, which is already a violent style by its very nature, accentuates his character perfectly. Chen Sing spent a good portion of his career playing the heavy (probably because of his sleazy mustache, as Keith Allison would put it) and he gives a career best performance here.

Angela Mao is her usual fiery self, although since she’s happily married and engaged for the first half, we in the audience get to see a side of her that we usually don’t see in her in these movies. Other than some playful ribbing prior to the marriage consummation, she seems to be just as loving a wife as one could hope for in a woman who could stare a hole in Wolverine’s skull (and luckily for false I-Fan, she doesn’t make him force her legs open like Lily Li and Judy Lee have done). However, once the [crap] starts hitting the fan, Angela becomes just as vicious and revenge-driven as she’s ever been in any of her films.

If this film marks Chen Sing’s best performance (at least as a villain), it is also a high watermark in Dorian Tan Tao-Liang’s filmography, too. You see, Dorian Tan was a sublime cinematic kicker. He was not, however, much of an actor. He was decent when it came to playing stick-up-the-rear stoic and righteous types, but he didn’t have any

range beyond that. Moreover, he was never much more than his kicking skills when it came to screen fighting; his hand and weapons techniques were often adequate at best. Unfortunately for Tan, once he moved to Taiwan to make movies there, a lot of the action directors there had absolutely no idea what to do with his skills, so we were often forced to see a great superkicker perform below his abilities. Compare that to his disciple John Liu, who was always charismatic in his movies and was blessed to work with choreography giants like the Yuen Clan, Ricky Cheng, Alan Chui, and Robert Tai in most of his movies, all of whom knew how to milk his abilities for all they were worth. Poor Tan, he had a great nickname but the people around him didn't know how to make good on it.

Where was I, again? Oh yes, this was a high point in Dorian Tan's career. He does a solid job of playing Chin Kang, who loves Ching Lan but can't really do anything because he's a simple stable boy while she's a rich girl; he gets to emote a little more than he does in most of his other movies. This is also probably the only film that gave Tan a love scene, although the camera thankfully focuses on Angela Wang's face during the brief act than on his. From the POV of action, I don't hesitate to say that he furnishes his best work here. Sammo Hung and Han Ying-Chieh (probably a lot more the former than the latter) direct him to deliver the goods with speed, snap, height, and flexibility not often seen in his other movies. His multiple kicks and hop kicks are as powerful and swift as they ever were and, unlike some of his later Taiwanese movies, he uses both his legs instead of just his left leg.

My major beef with the movie is intimately tied to my favorite thing about the movie: the climatic duel. With regards to the former, the main thing I don't like about this movie is that both Angela's and Dorian's skills are downplayed until the last 10 minutes, when they come back to the manor for an explosive confrontation against Kao Chu and his henchmen. Tan Tao-Liang gets to two fights prior that downplay his kicking and a brief sparring match with Angela that serves as an appetizer for the end. Angela gets a brief fight at the beginning and then doesn't fight until the end (bar the aforementioned friendly sparring with Tan). I really wish that director Huang Feng could've paced the film a little better so that we could've gotten at least one more fight from the two before the finale. That's not to say there isn't a lot of action, because we get to see Chen Sing fight a lot during the movie; I just wanted more from Angela Mao and Dorian Tan, that's all.

That said, the climax is a wonderful display of kicking prowess from the two leads, as they beat about two dozen stuntmen (and Sammo Hung sporting a leather vest and a perm) to death with their feet. Sammo Hung was always a superior choreographer, even when he was in his early 20s competing against older, more experienced action directors like Tong Gaai, Lau Kar-Leung, and even fellow action director Han Ying-Chieh, whose work I've often classified as being okay at best. Sammo choreographed most of Angela's films while she was at Golden Harvest studios and nobody could make her look as brutal and fierce as he could. He choreographed Tan in this film and in *Hand of Death*; this film is definitely better. When Angela and Dorian finally face off with Chen, we get a truly sublime two-on-one duel that ends on a very brutal note (you'll never look at leaves the same again).

Beyond the action, *The Himalayan* benefits from a nice change of location, having been shot on location in Tibet (presumably during the summer). The costumes are also a bit different than what we see in your typical Republic-era chop-sockey films. The revenge-driven storyline is standard, but its execution and emphasis on how the villain is able to take control of the protagonists' estate help set it apart a little more. One may argue that the movie is less about revenge and more about a man whose greed drives him to murder more and more until his Day of Reckoning comes (in the form of kung fu justice, as it should). That alone is enough to set the film apart from the rest until the last act when the movie reverts back to a theme we all love: Don't piss off Angela Mao, especially if she has another fellow superkicker on her side.

**Hitman in the Hand of Buddha (South Korea, 1981: Hwang Jang Lee)** - Me and Dragonclaws sent each other a list of movies that we would want to watch and review. I of course gave him a list of Chang Shan movies to choose from, and some way or another I ended up reviewing *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha*. And man is it a pleasure to review a movie like this. It's a special movie for kung fu fans. AFAIK this is the only HK movie where Hwang Jang Lee is the lead actor. Similar to Bolo Yeung, Hwang had to direct the movie in order to finally get a leading role. I don't know about you guys but if I was a movie producer I would want Hwang to be the lead in every movie. Hwang and Bolo as the heroes and Chang Shan as the villain. In every movie.

Right from the get go director Hwang gives his fans a treat. At the beginning of the movie we see Hwang (with no mustache!) go up and rob a man. It looks like he's back to his villainous ways. But then Hwang gets attacked by a bunch of thugs, and he takes them all out with the greatest kicking display ever put to film. Then he gives the man his wallet back. It turns out that Hwang took the man's wallet so the thugs couldn't get it. So, Hwang's the good guy in this movie!

The fights range from good to very good. This movie has the best chopsticks fight of all time and Hwang's kicking is as good as I've ever seen him. The villain Eddy Ko is disappointing. He's not one of the genre's better fighters, so the finale is a bit of a letdown. But if you are a fan of Hwang Jang Lee you have to have this movie. Anybody who is a fan of kicking in kung fu movies needs this.

The story is not worth going over. Hwang wants to take revenge so he trains with Shaolin monks and then he fights the bad guy at the end. What's cool about the story is that Hwang is recruited to fight the villain. I love how the awesome title *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha* actually fits the movie. Sent by Buddha, Hwang has been chosen as the hitman. Buddha bless you.

I remember my favorite version of this movie is from Tai Seng. I think I may have sold that DVD so for this review I watched the Korean version (which was released in the UK and also in the US Videoasia Martial Arts Essentials volume 7). It runs 81:31. It seems to move at a faster pace and the editing is more choppy than the Tai Seng version. It is in Korean language and sounds pretty harsh, the pic quality is not very good, full screen, and the music is different. I like the music in this Korean version. And one really cool feature is that there's no credits blocking your view of the amazing opening scene. Before the movie plays it says- "please note that this is the original director's cut of *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha* and is the only print available in the world. This version was located on 3/4" video tape in a Korean film vault on the outskirts of Seoul and is a rough cutting copy, edited by The Fox himself." I also have this movie on the Wu Tang Iron Fist Blu Ray. I haven't watched it all the way through but I can tell you that the running time is 72:41. Pic quality is good but really scratchy and it's widescreen 2.35. But like most of the other movies in this set pixelation is a big problem.

**Hocus Pocus (Hong Kong, 1984: Chin Yuet-Sang)** - I have been so slow to get to horror influenced watching which normally dominates my October viewings. For a variety of reasons I just have not been in the mood and have watched other genres. What better way to start (well technically restart since I saw *The Brood* at the beginning of the month) then a Hong Kong ghost/comedy film with some kung fu.

Since this is pre-*Mr. Vampire*, Lam Ching-ying is not yet in Taoist *sifu* mode (I realize this statement will make no sense to people who have not seen a lot of Hong Kong films.) But he is a venerable leader of a Peking Opera troupe full of prima donnas (specifically Chia played by Law Ho-kai who has one very unfortunate scene with a baby, I hope he got extra pay for that), newbies and solid martial artists. They are soon visited by an impish but ultimately good ghost, in one of the uglier ghost outfits, played by the director Chin Yuet-sang.\* But he is not the only ghost they will have to contend with.

This definitely needed more kung fu and/or a script especially given that this is a Sammo Hung production. It starts off with a fantastical Peking Opera scene that had me hoping this was an underrated film in the vein of *Zu: The Warriors from the Magic Mountain* which came out the year before. I also saw way too much under-cranking which I could not figure out if it was supposed to be there or there was a speed-up with the DVD. It meanders during the mediocre middle of the movie which has its moments of hilarity but also many moments of repetition as the Opera members mainly play practical jokes on each other. However, that ending was entertaining. I do not see too many films that have such a promising start, a weak middle yet has a satisfactory ending.

John Charles in his book Hong Kong Filmography (he rates this a 6/10) states that some of the score is lifted from *Suspira*. That is about what I would rate it. This is the type of movie to watch after you have seen the better horror/comedy/kung fu hybrids like *Mr. Vampire* and *Spooky Encounters*, but definitely not before. Unless you like turtles, then you might also want to skip this (completely ignoring how much dog blood was used in this.)

**Holy Robe of Shaolin Temple, The (People's Republic of China, 1986: Tsui Siu-Ming)** - Fans of the Jet Li 'Shaolin Temple' series would certainly find much to enjoy in this mainland picture, apparently a prequel to the Jet movies although it was made afterwards. Like those films it features the skills of the national wu shu team. Being a mainland feature I wasn't familiar with any of the principal actors except for a young Yu Rong Kwong who appears as the film's villain.

Yu Rong Kwong plays an ex-member of the Wu Tang society who is sent by an evil warlord to take control of Shaolin temple and steal a sacred holy robe. He leads the attack against Shaolin but the chief abbot manages to escape and entrusts the robe to one of his most skilful pupils who goes into hiding and blends in with a group of desert nomads.

The villains eventually track him down and the monk is forced to seek refuge inside the headquarters of Wu-tang. There he concentrates on his training in readiness for the final showdown.

Like the Shaolin Temple series this feels at times like a showcase for the skills of the wu shu team. Again we get to see monks bouncing on their heads and performing amazing acrobatics, something that I find terrifically entertaining. The fight choreography is superb featuring some very graceful wu shu moves and this is further enhanced by the competent camerawork and editing.

Yu Rong Kwong puts in a good performance martial arts-wise as does the guy who plays the film's hero (not sure of his name). I couldn't really comment on the acting as I was watching a dubbed version. The final showdown between these two is an absolute stunner and certainly lives up to the precedent set by the first three films.

**Horse Boxing Killer (Taiwan, 1979: Chester Wong) – aka Cute Foster Sister** - Fairly typical for a 1979 Taiwanese indie, this is the usual mixture of mild revenge with silly comedy. In this case, there is a male and female lead whose stories don't seem to connect at all for much of the film, leading one to suspect they were two unfinished films patched together, but no, they do finally meet up!

The English title is rather misleading, as for the most part (including the opening titles) the focus is on Swallow Boxing. The Horse Boxing Killer only turns up 50min into the movie (finally starting the plot) and doesn't get to use his style (which looks rather daft) until near the end of the film.

Top billed is Yuen Siu Tien. However, he only appears for 10min early into the picture playing, what else?, the Drunken Master. Like many of his 1979 films, he looks very tired and old. Leading man Wong Goon Hung is very stolid and serious, like he's wandered it out of an early 70's basher. Liu Hao Yi is cute but a bit annoying as the heroine.

Acting kudos goes to Lung Fei as the villain (despite his goofy horse style) and the extremely agile (and convincingly elderly) Wang Tai Liang. Their climatic fight is very effective.

Nothing special but fun and nicely familiar, and with a good compiled score (seriously, how awesome is that Hang Em High theme), enjoy!

**Hot, the Cool & the Vicious, The (Taiwan, 1976: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Captain Lu (Tang Tao Liang) is the ultra stern and righteous ass-kicking security chief of a small town where no criminals can escape the grasp of his striking feet. Then some mysterious strangers arrive. One turns out to be Pai Yung Chung (Don Wong) a notorious trouble making martial rogue who claims he's only sight-seeing but actually is very much up to something. The other is Ms. Lee who has a very personal score to settle with Captain Lu from the time when he was a less law-abiding citizen himself. It's at this point that the no-good rotten spoiled son of the town's richest and most influential notable Mr Yuen (George Wang) accidentally kills the mother of Captain Lu's fiancée. The latter swears to arrest him thus leading to a conflict with Mr Yuen, the very man who named him to his post, and Pai Yung Cheung who for his own mysterious reason puts himself in between them as Yuen's new bodyguard. And always lurking around is the mysterious Mr Lung, a lame, hunchback martially expert albino who's an associate of Mr Yuen in some shady business and who will eventually come out in the open to confront both Lu and Pai.

Like SECRET RIVALS a kung fu pot-boiler done the same-year with co-star Don Wong, THE HOT, THE COOL AND THE VICIOUS (1976) is sort of a gimmick movie where two heroes: one a southern stylist, the other a leg fighter are put in a conflicting situation only to ally themselves and become the best of buddies by the end to fight a very powerful common enemy. Various sorts of intrigues, double-dealings, hidden agendas, and tentative romances along with the occasional kung fu bash-in are what makes-up the bulk of the plot. Even if HOT, THE COOL AND THE VICIOUS is basically a rip-off of an earlier film, it still remains intriguing and well paced and whose genial performers display superb skill with a rocking fighting finale to make an entertaining kung fu romp.

Of course, Tao Liang's superb kicking provides some superb action within, but Don Wong's southern style manoeuvres are equally savvy, while chief villain Tommy Wong, not only does mantis fist along with lots of kicking and acrobatics befitting a Peking Opera performer but as a hunchbacked, lame albino with superlative fighting skills he comes across as an outlandish looking villain. Wong also serves as the film fight choreographer. It's interesting to

note that with one of the heroes being a leg-fighter, the other a southern stylist and the villain a Peking Opera performer full of fancy acrobatic moves you get all of your three basic types of kung fu action in one movie. Beyond the fighting, one more character provides some nice visuals: the town bitchy and seductive red-clothed inn-hostess who is eye candy.

H, C and V was directed by Lee Tso Nam, an able semi-reputed kung fu director-journeyman, who delivered some notable minor entries into the old school martial art genre such as THE LEG FIGHTERS also starring Tang Tao-Liang. His films appear to go beyond the "I want REVENGE" kind of plot prevalent in kung fu movie making. Based on H, C and V as well as LEG FIGHTERS this reviewer is looking forward to seeing some of his other films. Tang Tao Liang is a relatively well-known mid-level kung fu star; famous for his awesome kicking abilities and his student John Liu was the leg-fighting co-star playing in SECRET RIVALS opposite Don Wong. The latter is not as well-known as Tang. With his mop-head and his facial structure he could easily pass for one of those Bruce Lee clones and he actually did start as a Bruce Lee replacement. Indeed back in 1972, Bruce was scheduled to play a Sino- American cop opposing corrupt colleagues and a thugish gangster played by Chuck Norris. He, however, wasn't interested in working again with the planned director Lo Wei who he had done his two previous films with and who he considered an incompetent hack. Bruce wanted to direct his own movie. So exit the Bruce, enter the Don, a real live American cop or so this reviewer has read in one source. The film the YELLOW FACED TIGER (74) tanked tremendously and Don Wong disappeared for three years reappearing in the cult classic SECRET RIVALS. From the late seventies to mid eighties he starred in around two dozen kung fu films before retiring in 1986. He was never a huge star but seemed to have been a capable well-liked player within the genre. He was paired many times with Tang as well as doing a lot of movies with director Lee including a sequel to The H, C and V called CHALLENGE OF DEATH (81).

SOUTHERN FIST, NORTHERN LEG AND THE KING OF HELL (H, C AND V's original Chinese title) opens with the customary form-display showcase done by the films lead players, a generic sequence all jazzed-up by a rocking tune promising a great kung fu spectacle. In this reviewer's opinion the film actually holds to its promise in that regard, even if for most of an hour there's much more talking than fighting. No matter, the noose of intrigue is so tight and fun it holds the film together without feeling like useless fill-in and once the fighting begins it's a real nice action trip.

**Human Lanterns (Hong Kong, 1982: Sun Chung)** - This will be a quick one because I just watched *Human Lanterns* for the first time and I haven't collected all my thoughts about it together just yet.

The first thing I noticed off the bat was the editing. Sun Chung's editing is well known for being somewhat unorthodox and the opening credits as well as an early opening scene show case this brilliantly. The opening credits showcases an assortment of creepy images, cutting each image to the rhythm of the thunder sound effects and inserting lightning imagery in between each cut. These images help to set the tone for the rest of the film - you know there's some weird stuff going down and you really want to know what that weird stuff is going to be.

We then move onto another scene where we have our main guy Master Lung, played by Lau Wing, practicing with his sword. This is interspersed with his wife preparing her makeup and jewellery. The way it is cut makes it almost feel like they're just in the next room from each other, but at the end of this sequence, we find that they're at opposite ends of the house in an absolutely stunning shot (sorry for the blurry screenshot):

Which helps to further cement that the film is going to be somewhat unsettling because we can't quite trust the editing to give us a sense of spatial coherence.

This sets off a sequence of events where Master Lung, a guy who wants to be the best at everything, tries to upstage Master Tan, played by Chen Kuan-Tai, which leads them to declaring that they will compete to see who ends up with the best lantern. Master Lung tracks down a lantern maker, Chun Fang (Lo Lieh), who happens to be an old rival who he had almost killed. He asks Chun Fang to make him the best lantern to upstage Master Tan, but little does he know that Chun Fang agrees to this only to kickstart his revenge plan.

*Human Lanterns* is a gorgeous film. Every shot feels purposeful. Lighting is always atmospheric and changes at the blink of an eye to suit the mood. The fight choreography isn't even all that amazing, but it's just as much fun to watch because of how Sun Chung shoots his action. There are many long shot long takes in the fights which puts us in a kind of observer status to the fights. These are intercut with more traditional fight cinematography where the camera moves with the action to give us the best possible view of the movements. This is not to mention that the costumes and special effects are pretty great as well - Lo Lieh dresses up in some Chewbacca-like costume with a skeleton face and as he peels the skin off his poor victims, it totally looks real.

I've barely scratched the surface of early 80s Shaw Brothers films, but it looks like their efforts to reel viewers in with all sorts of craziness mixed with the talent of great directors led to incredibly entertaining movies with high artistic value just like this one. I'm sure pretty much everyone else on the forum has seen it, but I'm gonna go ahead and give this a recommendation anyway. Easily in my top 5 SB films.

PS: I apologise if this doesn't exactly fit the requirements - I watched this expecting it to be a ghost movie, but it ended up not being one. But anyway, hope you guys like the review.

**Hurricane, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Lo Wei)** - From back when the Golden Harvest logo/intro was literally a shot of golden harvest followed by "presented in Dyal Scope!", comes this Lo Wei (Fist Of Fury) directed Wuxia. Trying to make his audience captivated by the secretive plot of what a particular message carried by the Hurricane (Patrick Tse) contains, there's little excitement or coherency in his story anchor so the flick goes little refined places. By turning off and just watching, you get a view of some nice outdoor scenery (there's little indoor sets used), decent action for its time that gains more momentum when it's intense and in a way I personally like the feeling of these low budget genre vehicles. It's tough to explain but it's a favourable response despite watching a weak film. Something to write a paper on one day perhaps. Also starring Sek Kin and Nora Miao.

**I Will Finally Knock You Down, Dad (Hong Kong, 1984: Tyrone Hsu Hsia)** - Get past the goofy title, and this is a gem. Done in the early 1980s, this comedy introduced a young Chin Siu Ho as a Yuen Biao-type comedy fighter. Indeed, Chin's acting and kung fu here are VERY similar to Yuen's early work (probably because Shaw Brothers wanted to compete with their cross Hong Kong rivals). So is the story, reminiscent of "Prodigal Son". Chin, Ko Fei and (surprisingly) Chen Kuan Tai show off very crisp, acrobatic, intricately-choreographed old school kung fu that is satisfying. Highly entertaining. It is too bad Chin Siu Ho never followed this performance with more pure martial arts films.

**I'll Get You One Day (Hong Kong, 1970: Chan Lit-Ban)** - Films shouldn't be this much fun. Even without subs this is an enormously enjoyable and entertaining film as it switches back and forth between frothy go-go pop songs and frantic kung fu female fighting. If this is a sample of the 1960's Cantonese action film scene I am in trouble because this stuff could become addictive. So far very little of this market has been aimed at a Western audience in the same way that the Shaw films have been recently and there has unfortunately been minimum attempt to restore the aging prints. So the viewer has to put up with more scratches than an alley cat and a general blanding of the color palate, but at least for this film it is well worth putting up with these minor distractions. This film was made in 1970 just as the Cantonese film industry was hitting rock bottom with only 35 releases that year and 1 the next until it began to rebound a few years later with the success of the Hui Brothers.

When it did though few of the stars of the earlier Cantonese film industry came back with it unless it was more in supporting roles such as Woo Fung and Kenneth Tsang or as a lead role in the occasional off-beat film like Josephine Siao. Others simply moved over to television where they found success in a medium that was still Cantonese based and some like Connie Chan Po-chu simply retired with over 200 films under her belt at the age of 25. In fact, Connie was to make only a few more films after this one – interestingly her final film was her first one for the Shaw Brothers – “The Lizard” in 1972. One might surmise that she didn't appreciate the heavy-hand of the Shaw Brothers or its star system in which she was no longer at the top. Having seen “The Lizard” I can only say that it barely hints at the charisma and star appeal that Connie shows in some of her Cantonese efforts – in “I'll Get You One Day” she is a force of nature constantly on the move – her eyes blazing – her legs kicking and spinning – but there is one small moment near the end of the film when the camera simply stares as it holds her face in near freeze frame as it heartbreakingly registers what she has just witnessed – and at that moment you realize why she was so beloved and such a star. Of course her funky what the hell was that dance steps didn't hurt!

The film opens with Connie giving a judo demonstration to her class as she takes on one student after another and tosses them around like paper dolls. Having this skill will come in very handy over the next few days. She rooms with her sister played by the very bubbly Nancy Sit and is being courted by Kenneth Tsang – a plain clothes policeman and they like dressing the same way when they go out. When not flipping people over her shoulder, she and Nancy are singers at a nightclub where they pump out Technicolor tunes to the obvious glee of what seem to be a bunch of horny old men who can barely stay seated. In fact, we get three songs in a row – all filmed in that queasy 70's soft-core soft focused colored glow in which faces appear in hearts or in kaleidoscope images or all of a sudden the



girls are surrounded by fields of flowers. It's so wonderfully tacky that you have to gurggle in pleasure especially as the camera for some bizarre reason flashes back and forth between ceramic figures for some effect that must have been cool at the time but is totally mystifying now.

Without the subtitles there are some things I may have missed out on or misinterpreted, but this is my best guess. After the lengthy musical interlude the movie kicks into gear. A gang of five guys – headed by a young Stanley Fung pre-moustache and including the bald-headed Fung King Man – hold up a jewelry store – a few of them hidden behind stockings, the others could only afford sunglasses I guess – and in their getaway one of them runs into Nancy and she gets a good look at him. Along with Connie and Tsang she is taken to police headquarters where Cheung Ching (who often starred in Cathay films as the woeful boyfriend type) questions her. Back home they receive a phone call and are threatened not to be witnesses, but instead Nancy draws a picture of the man she bumped into. The next day while out in the street they see this man coming at them – staggering – he has a knife in his back and dies at their feet but not before a key comes slipping out of his mouth and he tells them this will lead them to the stolen jewels. The gang is right behind him and Connie gets into her first free for all she as takes them all on in a good old fashioned punch em up.

The film turns into a running scenario of the bad guys trying to track down the two sisters because they have this key and Connie fighting them off – with only some minor help from Nancy who apparently skipped her kung fu classes. Two scenes make this film a minor classic. At one point Nancy is kidnapped by the gang and Connie attempts to find her whereabouts. To do this she goes into male mode – something she often did in her films apparently – as she slicks back her hair, puts on jeans and sunglasses and has a cigarette dangling from her mouth – maybe it's just me but she never looked better and wouldn't fool a blind man at twenty paces. Her first stop of business is a seedy shady pool hall where she takes a pool cue to some unruly heads to make a point. This is witnessed by Fung who seemingly doesn't recognize this "guy" and invites "him" back to the gang's hideout. If this was a Shaw film the hideout would likely have been burrowed in a cliff with loads of fashion conscious attendants running about – but the Cantonese films didn't have that kind of budget so their hideout has the look of a teenagers recroom with shag rugs and a small phonograph to keep them entertained. They are having a party and dancing something resembling the twist with a bevy of younger women and Connie is playing it tough all the way as she takes a deep drag on her cigarette like a dying man.

Stanley offers "her" one of these women to play with but after giving them the up and down inspection she tells him they are not her type – she wants something different to toy with. So they bring out a tied up Nancy who after a few looks is able to penetrate the amazing disguise of her sister and coos and happily sits on Connie's lap and begins to purr. At this point Stanley pulls out the little red pills and all his helpers and helpees grab one and are soon in a near comatose state with them all hiccupping and twitching – that is until he puts on a rock and roll song and soon they are all dancing like Zombies from a "B" movie. Then things really get odd when the two sisters give each other a knowing look and break into a song and dance number – that should really throw the bad guys off their trail – but its so wonderfully stupid that you can't help but love it and replay it multiple times.

Later after having escaped yet one more time, the girls are once again being tracked down by the gang and the final 20-minutes of the film turns into a terrific set piece as the girls are chased all over and continuously fight them off. Finally they find themselves trapped in a small neighborhood of half-demolished buildings that act as backstops to all the action as the girls dodge into one after another – by this time the original gang of five has grown into the gang of thirty and there is a constant series of attacks - all syncopated to a great jazz score that has infused the film from the beginning. The choreography is very solid and Connie's moves are very fluid and well timed as she dodges kicks, punches and knife thrusts from a gaggle of bad guys. This is just one of those films that you sit there and think - this is so cool. By the way - I am just curious - the woman pictured below performs a song in the nightclub and then disappears - does anyone know if she was a singer at the time?

Both Connie and Nancy were members of the "The Seven Cantonese Princesses" in the 1960's – a term for a group of very popular young actresses in the Cantonese film industry. The two biggest stars of them were Connie and Josephine Siao with the others often in co-starring roles. Other than Nancy, the others were child star Bo Bo Fung, Wong Oi-ming, Fung So-so (Bo Bo's sister) and Sum Chi-wah. These were the idols of their time. Connie was born in 1947 and both her parents were well-known Cantonese opera performers. As she grew up she studied opera as well as certain styles of martial arts under her parents – but because of her deep voice they thought she was suited to playing male roles. At the age of ten she performed in her first opera and soon moved into film in 1959 at the age of 12 making her debut in "The Scout Master". Later she mentored under the actress Yam Kim Fai and took easily to acrobatic roles.

As she grew older she seamlessly moved into wuxia roles – often playing a male figure – and over her career she made more than 90 wuxia films. She had her hand in every genre though – romances in which she was paired with Lui Kei for over 20 films, action, drama and musicals – basically she could do it all and she became enormously

popular. One of her first films to really put her on the map was the 1965 "Black Rose" and in a short period of time she made an amazing amount of films – often averaging around 20 a year. Basically the popularity of her and Josephine kept Cantonese film alive till the end of the decade. She first retired in 1970 and moved to Canada, but returned for "The Lizard" but that was it. In 1999 she came back to perform on stage taking on the character of her early teacher Yam Kim Fai.

**Ill Wind (Taiwan, 1970: Wong Fuk Sang)** - Just a really good, low budget wu xia, with tons of atmosphere. I was just really impressed with the acting and the story, on a very low budget without a lot of big stars. The dialogue is sparse and relies on the actors expressions to convey a lot of what is going on. They are up to the task. If you're looking for great fights, the choreography is nothing special, but the fights are involving as the characters are likable, so you root for them. Very few jumps or flying in the movie. The color on the copy I saw was very good in most parts, but there are a few washed out scenes. The story is probably cribbed from an old western, probably Italian, but who knows? The music is mostly Ennio Morricone, but well used. Shaws films are usually more polished, but I just really liked this one for what it is. Interestingly, like Black Tavern, most of the good guys are played by actors well known for playing heavies. Check it out!

**Image Of Bruce Lee (Hong Kong, 1978: Richard Yeung Kuen) – aka Storming Attacks** - It had already been five years since the Little Dragon had ascended to the next life, yet film companies were continuing to "capitalize" on his image all this time later. I put "capitalize" in quotes because very few if any of these companies were even remotely competent when it came to emulating the aesthetics for any of Bruce Lee's major adult films. Talk about sheer inconsistency too; we got plenty of sequels-that-no-one-asked-for-and-make-no-sense and kinda-but-not-really-remakes of *Fist of Fury*, *Enter The Dragon* and *Game of Death*, and (at least to my knowledge) nothing rehashed from Big Boss (The "sequel" simply doesn't count. Moving on) and *Way of The Dragon*. Seriously, it's not really that hard to craft a mindless yet fun Saturday afternoon kung fu basher, and yet the lot of the Bruceploitation titles always seem to fail miserably on that respect. Anyway, enough rambling for now.

So here we have yet another "Brucesploitation" that actually doesn't have much of anything to do with Bruce Lee, unless you count Ho Chung Tao very briefly donning the yellow jumpsuit that everyone and their grandmothers know about already. And also a painfully hamfisted and useless remark in the English dub.

Out of all the countless 'Bruce Lee imitator' films that were churned out, THE IMAGE OF BRUCE LEE is neither a good film or a bad one – just a barely tolerable effort that'll be entertaining for those who happen to be fond of these pseudo-knockoff movies of the Little Dragon. For once, Ho Chung Tao isn't being suffocated by needless demands to play a walking parody of Lee. Here we get to see him play a role that does not require him to re-emulate one of the countless well known publicity shots of Bruce. That is, no shrieking war screams and no random claw scratches in his body.

This one follows the thematic of ETD, in that the movie adopts a James Bond-style espionage plot as the good guys head off against a sinister drug enterprise, but it's all a simple excuse for a series of kung fu brawls, as there is no serious attempt at providing consistency to the narrative. Out of all the Bruceploitation flicks I've watched, this has got to be one of the most action-packed, and the last half an hour is essentially one big showdown. It's a shame, then, that the choreography is quite mediocre and the fights are rather stilted and wooden. I'm not sure if Han Ying Chieh also served as the choreography director in this one, but considering how lifeless and bored the actors seem to be in the fighting sequences, it's rather unlikely. Only Bolo Yeung delivers anything resembling a strong performance as far as the brawling goes. In fact, Bolo is one of the only two remarkable characters in the movie besides Tao, as the former takes a liking for showing off his glamorous (At least by late 70's standards) sense of fashion, seemingly as if he learned his cosmetic chops directly from the Little Dragon when he was still alive.

For what it's worth, the battles do make good use of it's set pieces, especially the final brawl at a dilapidated building and a beach. The obligatory moments of Bruceploitation sheer lunacy are still here – the opening scene, in which Tao climbs a building (in Bruce Lee's trademark yellow gym suit from GOF, apparently just to fill his imitation quota) in an attempt to rescue a guy attempting suicide, only for him to fall when he loses his prosthetic arm, is a classic. And yeah, it doesn't have any actual impact in the storyline (or lack thereof), not even a passing mention of it by any of the characters.

It would appear that the producers took a cue or two from the lurid content in Big Boss and ETD, because this is also one of the most risqué kung fu flicks I've witnessed, as co-star Dana, a Shaw Bros actress known for her erotic roles,

frequently sheds all of her clothing for plenty of showcasings of her porcelain-like birthday suit. I feel I should point out that the nudity is presented in a surprisingly unerotic way, and they also happen at the most random parts for no rhyme or reason. Not to pull a Tang Lung here, but at least in the context of action movies, if sudden nudity isn't related to and/or doesn't influence the overall narrative, it's just obnoxiously gratuitous for the sake of gratuity. I suppose such observation is rather moot for an exploitation movie, but it's still offputting. There's also a moment when Tao breaks into Han Ying Chieh's (who plays the villain) apartment and briefly flips through an album of pics of naked chicks in it, apparently in a non-so-subtle reference to the titular "Big Boss" from '71 that was also played by Chieh, and who also lusted for young women and enslaved them in a prostitution ring.

Overall, Ho Chung Tao's performance in here was a vast improvement compared to previous outings. While his fighting here is hardly phenomenal, e's got quite a bit of energy in here, performing a ton of malabarisms throughout the running time. He also had natural charisma of his own which helped him stand out from the awful "Bruce Li" persona that he was trapped with for much of his career. THE IMAGE OF BRUCE LEE isn't a good flick, not even average, but not even remotely as insulting as the vast majority of the Bruceploitation crappola in exist. It's worth a watch for the sake of curiosity.

**Immortal Warriors (Taiwan, 1979: Cheng Kang)** - This 1979 period martial arts film starts off quite promisingly, but somewhere along the way it begins bogging down in too much plot. Complaining about there being too much plot may seem like a shallow thing to say – but there are times when all you want to do is watch some fairly mindless action – people whacking one another among a flurry of somersaults and spins. This film actually has a reasonably complex story that I just wasn't in the mood for. What I really wanted was plenty of Polly Shang Kwan showing her wonderful impish humor and her great athletic skills – and though she looks terrific in her head-dress and battle gear, she didn't have nearly enough screen time or enough action scenes to suit me.

There are tragic elements within that should have involved me more than they did, but they simply left me impatiently waiting for more action. After five months of being besieged by a rebellious army, the castle of Sung General Lu Teng is finally overridden. As he sees the end coming near, Lu Teng plans his death – and that of his family, but the faithful servant, Gua Ah Leh (Lady Rose in Miracles) offers to replace Lu Teng's young son with her own so that the family line will continue to survive.

She has to watch her own son have his head cut off, but in an ironic twist the commander of the enemy army unknowingly decides to adopt this boy and keep Gua in his employ. The boy, Wen Lung, thus grows up along with the daughter of his father's killer, Polly, believing that the Sung's are his enemy. They are trained by Lo Lih (in a white wig) in the martial arts and become quite proficient by the time they are still young. While still a teenager, Wen becomes a General and is ordered to attack the Sung's in the ongoing war.

It's a bit confusing at first telling who are the good guys and who are the bad guys – but since the Sung's wear neat little golden helmets while the other guys run around with ratty racoon tails hanging down their faces, I must assume the Sung's are the ones we are suppose to be rooting for. Style should count for something. The Sung's learn who Wen really is but can't get close to him to tell him the truth. How to do this? Why not have someone pretend to defect - but how to make it convincing? Ah, of course, cutting off your arm brings a certain degree of authenticity to the plan.

They finally convince the young man of the truth – and now he must avenge his family that he never knew against the family that he has come to love. A thorny issue for a teenager you must admit. Should I ask dad for the keys to the carriage for a date or should I kill him. Most of the action is swordplay rather than hand to hand – and not particularly inspired for the most part. Polly is in a few fights – but nothing that really allows her to display her talents to their best effect.

**Imperial Sword, The (Taiwan, 1977: Chen Chi-Hwa)** - aka **Kung Fu Shadow; Brave in Kung Fu Shadow** - This is a very entertaining Judy Lee (Chia Ling) vehicle that is full of well choreographed action from beginning to end, a serviceable plot that is not original but provides for lots of opportunities to fight and loads of Judy Lee. Not only does she look very good in her action scenes, she just plain looks great in this film – moving or standing still. Not that an actress looking attractive in a kung fu film should matter to a kung fu purist – but since I am far from that I very much appreciated the charming outfits she wears and the myriad of close ups that director, Chang Chi Hwa, provides us. In most of the films I have seen her in she has been a bit masculine and often disguised as a male, but not here. She even gets a tiny bit flirtatious at times.

The Blood Reign Sword – a valuable imperial treasure – has come into the possession of Judy Lee and nearly everyone in the film is trying to kill her in order to get it. She on the other hand is passing herself off as two people -

one a female beggar and the other a sweet waitress - while she looks for the man who killed her father. As the female beggar she walks about town in a raggedy looking patched up ensemble and wooden staff, but when she spies some men chasing after a frightened woman the staff comes into action as she sends them spinning in all sorts of directions. This first scene clues you in that this will be a good film – the fighting is crisp, Judy looks very able and the stuntmen get knocked about with great panache.

Another mysterious good looking stranger shows up in town and he seems to know a great deal and shows up whenever Judy is in trouble – which is often. Though she is a wonderful fighter, she is not the smartest woman around and she keeps walking into traps and going up against overwhelming odds. The main bad guy – an expert with the eagle claw – not only has lots of expendable minions to get killed by Judy, he also is able to send for some professional killers to take her on. This makes for some fine small action scenes and some other larger scale ones that leave dead bodies piled around the grounds like garden furnishings.

Eventually a relative of Judy's is killed in cold blood and she brings the Blood Reign sword out of hiding and really gets down to killing. The sword fights are excellent – lots of clashing of blades, spurts of blood, jumping or flipping over opponents or to the roof tops, deadly poisoned darts being deflected – all good stuff. Eventually only the main bad guy is left standing – but his kung fu is much superior to Judy's and her ally – so they use many clever traps of their own in hopes of bringing him down.

**Imperial Sword, Crouching Devil (Taiwan, 1981: Fong Ho)** - When you don't have the benefit of a very watchable video version (in this case cropped, including the subtitles), you rely on what little you can extract or from the story (which may be a basic one anyway, following templates) and the visuals. It's in the latter department Imperial Sword, Crouching Devil scores anyway. There's heroes and opponenents, some from above but what ultimately is striking about Fong Ho's direction is that it's a very animated Wuxia Pian. 80s computer game sound effects, wirework, pyrotechnics, ingenious traps (one that apparently contains sand that can melt your body and the opening is Indiana Jones crossed with a fantasy like this) and Chang Yi as the villain able to divide himself up into several parts and teleport anyway, even without subtitlea it would've been a bit of a loud Wuxia Pian treat. All set to the very contemporary and stolen movie music from 70s and 80s movies.

**Imposter, The (Hong Kong, 1975: Pao Hsueh-Li)**- Tseng Kan, a guard in the security bureau is blamed for the brutal murder of an entire family as well as the theft of \$30,000 dollars while on a job. His brother, Tseng Yun, is sent to locate a mysterious man named Ge Liang who happens to be a master of disguise. Under his various concealments, Ge Liang goes about trying to find out who was truly responsible for the terrible crime which happens to be linked in some fashion to the Captain of the police, Lo Gin Yin.

Director Pao gets sole reign here and delivers a strange brew of thriller and comical scenes laced with violent kung fu action to create an odd genre amalgamation that probably will disappoint those looking for hard core fight scenes. The fights are decent enough but they're fairly short and nothing spectacular but Pao uses enough bizarre elements to make the film intriguing enough for fans who seek something different from the usual kung fu extravaganzas prominent at the time.

Audience indifference may have been why the film performed poorly but then so did the Chiang directed *The Condemned* (1976). Possibly the HK audience of the time wasn't ready for seeing their popular actors portraying roles far different from the norm. Some of the photographic touches are very nice and lead me to believe that Pao (a former cinematographer) may have had a hand in that as well.

David Chiang (or John Chiang as he is now referred) gets to extend his acting range yet again in another variant on the kung fu picture. Here, light comical moments are mixed with the thriller and kung fu genres. Liang is a right smart character and he displays an almost cartoonish demeanor as he's often seemingly in multiple places at the same time as well as staying one step ahead of the bad guys through most of the film. An extremely sly, cunning and brazen character, his various get ups include a beggar on the street, an old, stingy loan shark, an oddly dressed kung fu fighter named the One-Eyed Dragon, a distinguished aristocrat and the assistant to the Commander of the military!

Although Chiang owns the film and gets top billing, the film is an acting showcase for Wang Chung for the duration of his screen time. He's never been as good as he is here at least in the films I've seen him in. He's good in his action roles, but here he comes off more human than usual. He's even brought to tears on a few occasions as he tries desperately to have his brother acquitted of the crimes he's been accused of. Wang Chung never quite caught on

with audiences in HK but did go on to a decent directorial career throughout the 80s handling a number of crime thrillers including *The Mobfix Patrol* (1981), *The Murderer Pursues* (1981) and *The Informer* (1980).

Li Hsueh Hsin (*Mighty Peking Man*, *The Killer*) is also really good as Tseng Kan. It's a shame it took him close to 20 years to receive audience recognition. He played so many varied characters throughout his long career but never seemed to catch on with HK moviegoers until his performance in *The Killer* (1989). He plays a role drastically different from his Chang Cheh roles. He still plays a martial artist but a very emotional one especially after he's been framed.

A flashback scene reveals the events that led to Tseng Kan being incarcerated. It's a very violent scene in which even the little children are massacred. Tseng Yung is unconscious away from his brother and when the authorities arrive, it's Tseng Kan who is the only one alive. Of course, as usual in these movies, he is accused of the entire ordeal without anyone checking out the scene to find evidence to the contrary.

The scene in which Ge Liang craftily breaks the two brothers out of jail using the prostitute Su Su is humorous. He also finds the time to break out the fake Assistant Chen whom Ge Liang had earlier masqueraded as; all part of his elaborate plan to lure out the bad guys. Everything comes to a head when Captain Lo double crosses all the villains just before Ge Liang shows up to have a fight with him.

Fans of Chen Kuan Tai will be disappointed to know that he doesn't fight until the end and he is no match for David Chiang's Ge Liang character. In fact, Captain Lo is a right sleazy official preferring to shoot men in the back or attack them from behind with a shovel. His duel with Ge Liang surprisingly doesn't end the way you'd think it would but even still, everything ends well for everybody. The final moments sees Ge Liang getting aboard his boat with his real girlfriend, Bei Hwa only to have Su Su give chase forcing him to jump into the sea to escape after having promised to marry her earlier in the film.

Speaking of Chen Ping, the exploitation queen of Shaw Brothers movies gets to strut her assets here getting naked on several occasions stripping completely and looking really good in the process in her role as the nymphomaniacal prostitute, Su Su. There's also a fair number of other familiar faces seen during the film as well as some cameos such as Ku Feng being caught in bed with a pretty hooker as Ge Liang (disguised as the One-Eyed Dragon) goes about inspecting men's legs to see if they have a stab wound which would prove the innocence of Tseng Kan. Wei Pai plays one of the henchmen and future pig butcher from *Flag of Iron* (1980), Chiang Chin appears briefly as a kung fu student.

An enjoyable but odd kung fu/thriller with light touches of comedy and enough sporadic martial arts sequences (courtesy of Huang Pei Chi) to qualify as a kung fu film, but none of them are wholly satisfying enough to please fans seeking that sort of thing but the performances and unusual storyline is enough to recommend to serious fans and completists alike.

**Imprudent Iron Phoenix, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Lin Fu-Ti)** - Captain Geng (Chia Ling) is called by the Director and is given a month's vacation (much to her displeasure). The Director tells her that this is time for relaxation not business, Capt. Geng promises that she will not be involved in other people's business unless necessary. At the local casino people are betting and then Teacher (Lung Ti) puts down his shoes, the Chaos men get angry so a fight ensues with Teacher losing nearly all of his clothes and Shao San Tzu (A Sai) having to steal some.

The Chaos find them and employ them. On their first day Shao tells the gamblers what numbers to pick and is forced to clean the toilet until dinner. Teacher beats up his own men but, not before Capt. Geng got to them first for cheating on their games. When Boss Chao (Miao Tien) tells his men to go to Geng's house all the men go and that's when Teacher & Shao find out who they were fighting so they switch sides.

Later on Geng gets an invitation to a duel but it's cut short in which she finds out that her aunt and uncle have been taken by the Chaos. She trades herself for their release. One of the gamblers who lost their wife to the Chaos wants her back and asks Teacher for help to get her back and he agrees. The gambler's wife goes to give Geng the food and then asks Boss Chao if she can stay with her husband for a day, Boss Chao replies no, so she steals the bag, gives it to Shao San Tzu who drops it, and Captain Geng finds out what kind of people the Chaos really are...

This official sequel to the *Girl Named Iron Phoenix* (1973), directed by Lam Fook-Dei (*The Imperial Swordsman* - 1972, *Girl Named Iron Phoenix* - 1973, *Shaolin Monk* - 1977) is a good film to add to your collection it may have its highs (action) and its lows (comedy) but if you can put an open mind when watching a film like this you can expect a good

time. Also starring Melvin Cheung Wan-Man, Lau Ming, Cheung Keung, Ko Fei, Jimmy Lung Fong, Lee Kwai, Gam Ban, Woo Hon-Cheung, Wong Fei, and Sham Chin-Bo. A Fung Ming Motion Picture Co., Ltd. Release.

**In the Beginning (Taiwan, 1979: Luo Shan)** - The Chinese fairy tale version of the creation of the universe. This movie gets my vote as the single worst film ever made. It's almost unintelligible. Eighty percent of the film is so dark you can't see what's going on. The script makes almost no sense (like a strange teenager's rambling super 8 movie, only it's 2 hours long.) Think of a bad episode of Star Trek with primitive cavemen, only speaking Mandarin. Lots of people in grass skirts pointing at the sky (at "gods" who, poof, appear on mountain tops) or looking at each other. Do not be fooled by the cool promotion artwork on the box (Chen Sing in a one-legged stance, another guy throwing a high kick---these scenes aren't even in the movie!) Cheesiest "special effects" ever seen. No martial arts. Chen Sing is Pan Ku (the Chinese atlas), who, dressed in a loincloth, grunts and holds up the sky.

**Incredible Kung Fu Master (Hong Kong, 1979: Joe Cheung)** - In 1979, Sammo Hung was at the peak of his powers as an onscreen fighter, choreographer and director. He was dividing his time between numerous projects, not least classics like *Magnificent Butcher* and *Odd Couple*. One of his lesser known movies from this year was *The Kung Fu Master* (aka *The Incredible Kung Fu Master*), a gem of "kung fu comedy" notable for many things including a starring role for Stephen Tung Wai, better known as the kid Bruce Lee teaches at the beginning of *Enter the Dragon*. Tung Wai actually carved out a great career subsequently as a choreographer, with credits such as *Donnie Yen's Bodyguards and Assassins*, Hou Hsiao Hsien's *The Assassin* and the upcoming Max Zhang-starrer *Invincible Dragon*.

The plot of *The Kung Fu Master* is formulaic, and just a platform for the "shapes" action (Note: The use of the word "shapes," in the context of kung fu cinema, relates to the highly intricate choreography style that reached its peak in the early 80s. Before "shapes", the choreography style was referred to as a "basher", i.e. more straight forward, simple punch and block).

Tung Wai stars as Kung Fu Ching, a lowly servant at a kung fu school run by one of two brothers (played by Billy Chan and Huang Hua) who are involved in challenges with other schools. Ching isn't allowed to learn from them, so he encounters Fei Jai (Hung), a master of various styles, whom he learns from. Soon the situations escalate into many martial encounters.

Never ending "shapes" of the highest order are delivered with such ferocity, intricacy and impact that it blows you away. While a hair's breadth away from the top Sammo "shapes," it's still ridiculous. The credits are a few for action: Sammo Hung's Stuntman Association, Yuen Baio, Leung Kar Yan, Lam Ching Ying and Billy Chan – with these guys in control, you're never far away from a fight that hits the sweet spot.

Tung Wai's versatility as a martial artist is given a great showcase, especially his acrobatics and handwork. We also get a rematch between Sammo and Lee Hoi San (*The Magnificent Butcher's* end fight barely topping this one). Lee was one of the go-to guys for villainous "shapes" and here we are treated to another: The late, great Phillip Ko\*, who has a cameo, but again proves his skills during a fight with Billy Chan and Huang Hua.

\*I was so sad to hear of Phillip Ko's recent passing; this guy was featured in so many of my favourites from the 70s to the 90s. His film credits rival even Sammo's. Two little known films of his I would recommend are: for old-school, *Choy Lee Fut Kung Fu* (not the dreadful Sammy Hung/Kane Kosugi movie from 2011) and *Killer's Romance*, a self-directed movie adaptation of the Manga *Crying Freeman*, starring Simon Yam. Ko also directed a film that has one of the funniest titles ever: *Royal Sperm*. His memory shall live on through his undoubted presence and mastery of screen fighting.

There is a veritable smorgasbord of martial arts and comedic talent that appear in *The Kung Fu Master*. Chung Fat has a role as an affluent student whose ineptitude betrays how good a fighter he is (check him out at the end of *Yes Madam!* fighting Michelle Yeoh). Meng Hoi has a small part as a student (amongst his many film credits, he also dated/doubled for blonde fury herself, Cynthia Rothrock).

The funny elements of *The Kung Fu Master* are at times a little grating, but mostly on point. There's the usual Three Stooges-style we are accustomed to in films of this type, with exaggerated sound effects and plenty of undercranking. A novel use of an oiled up patch of concrete for training and fight scenes is refreshing, and reflects Sammo and the team's creativity.

The Kung Fu Master just misses out absolute classic status due to the simplicity and silliness of the plotline, not to mention the pedestrian direction by Joe Cheung, who also was responsible for the disappointing Chow Yun Fat heroic bloodshed movie, *Flaming Brothers*. If you're looking for a "shapes" fest outside the box, look no further.

**Incredible Kung Fu Mission (Taiwan, 1979: Cheung San Yee)** - With much influence from the 'Dirty Dozen', 'Incredible Kung Fu Mission' sees John Liu, as a renowned fighter, hired to train and lead a band of five misfits in a dangerous venture that will surely end in death for at least a few of them. Their 'mission' is to rescue a revolutionary leader imprisoned in a warlord's (Robert Tai) fortress.

The dynamics of the team are established in the first half hour in which John Liu puts his subordinates through rigorous training involving lots of running, attacking assault courses and, of course, learning kung fu. This first section nicely introduces the characters and provides for some moments of comedy. It's also not entirely fight free as John Liu treats his team to a brothel visit which ends in a brawl with some local gangsters; an opportunity for the five to prove that they are ready for their adventure. The group then set off for the fortress having to disguise themselves to evade capture and fend off groups of assassins sent to stop them; the warlord's intelligence service, it seems, being astoundingly well informed.

Once the mission starts the film is pretty much fight after fight which builds up to an excellent, albeit slightly short, climax between John Liu and Robert Tai. Robert Tai, as the villain, has a special technique which involves using his cape to hide his oncoming kicks; it's a great added touch to an already excellent performance. While the film is obviously low budget the choreography is of a high standard throughout although the best stuff comes at the end. John Liu again shows off his kicking but at times resorts to using his hand to hold his leg up on some of the higher kicks (something I've noticed quite a bit in his films) which rather detracts from the effect. And slightly disappointingly, the rest of the cast are never really given much chance to shine with centre stage being largely taken over by John Liu. As good as he is, it would have been nice to see some more from the others, especially Robert Tai.

**Incredible Shaolin Thunderkick (South Korea, 1982: Kim Seon-Hyeong)** – aka **Water Retailer of Shandong** -

Acquired by Asso Asia from South Korea (with rights possibly being passed to Filmark later) and credited to Godfrey Ho, Kim Seon-Hyeong's original could've originated from Hong Kong or Taiwan as there's nothing here that sets it apart from the copycat efforts of the kung fu comedy-genre. Outside of the action that is. Weak comedy, a bullied waterboy (Benny Tsui), a drunken master, local thugs, training and a showdown, thankfully the action choreography is overall stellar. Incredibly quick exchanges and loaded with power, try and pursue a short version of the movie because the tighter experience will leave a better impression. Not everything that was standard genre-fare needed to be 90 minutes.

**Infernal Street (Taiwan, 1973: San Kong)** - Japanese gangsters flood a small Chinese town with opium causing a pandemic among the local population. Doctors assistant and Kung Fu tough guy Chi Shou (Yu Tien Lung) decides he's had enough of the crime and fights back.

*Infernal Street* is a pretty decent old school Martial Arts film that exploits the old Japanese/Chinese rivalry. Though it's hard to feel sorry for some of the local population. One addict played by Chang Feng is equally as rotten as the gangsters. At one point he tells his own daughter she should have worked in a brothel just so he could afford more opium. He later makes a bargain with the Japanese only to serve his own selfish addiction. There's also the local snitch and turn coat played superbly by Woo Gwong, his character is never given a name. He helps the gangsters to deal with Dr Chau (Cho Kin) and his assistants. Only one of the assistants Chou Shou is just as good at dishing out pain as he is helping people deal with it. The fact Chou's father died from opium use only adds to his anger and frustration. Unlike the Chen Zhen character in *Fist Of Fury*, Chou Shou is much more laid back. The two different acting personalities approached a similar role in alternative ways. Chou Shou becomes increasingly more angry and aggressive as the story progresses. Whilst the Chen Zhen character appears to be only just keeping it together from the the start.

The films fight scenes are decent enough and work well but they do lean more towards the basher style being an early 70's production. That said I think it would be wrong to say the fight scenes here belong entirely in that

category. The films star Yu Tien Lung also worked as the action director on this movie. He was not new to this role either having worked on sixteen other films as a fight choreographer before this one. The fight scenes in *Infernal Street* are bit more refined and have more finesse than some of the other films of that era. At the same time don't expect intricate or crisp displays of Kung Fu. The fights still manage to maintain a rough edge to them which I felt worked well. Most of the action is pretty short and to the point. With the exception of the intense finale which is what you would expect from an old school film.

Yu Tien Lung is a capable leading man and has some solid on screen fighting skills. He displays some nice kicks too even though he's no Whang In Sik. This is the only starring role I've managed to see him in. Not sure how his screen fighting looks in other films under different action directors?. The Japanese heavies are played by the same actors/stuntmen who always turn up in these roles. Lee Keung, Gam Man Hei and Wong Wing Sang have all donned the Japanese robes and handled a Katana many times. They all play their roles well as Chinese hating lackeys who rely on their boss to do the thinking for them. Their leader is played by the ever reliable Miao Tien (*Shaolin Wooden Men*). While he might not get a lot of screen time he's still a very capable and convincing villain. This is one of those films where the foreigners are portrayed as utterly evil with no redeeming qualities. At the same time the Chinese inhabitants of the town are not all saints either.

The main theme of the story is nothing new or original but you know what to expect from a film of this kind. There is a nice side plot involving Doctor Chu and the leader of the Japanese gang. This stops the film from being entirely about the young hero just going round cracking heads. There's also the usual love interest as Chou Shou takes a liking to the doctors daughter Tien Fei, played by actress Wong Ging Ping (*Disciples Of Shaolin*). She does get to show off some Martial Arts skills but doesn't do anything particularly special. Her character is one of the more likable ones in the film as she refuses to sit back and let things get worse. There are some super human elements in some of the scenes. Including the heroes ability to lodge nut shells into a wall from just spitting them out of his mouth. When compared to other films of the era this element is not too excessive.

It would be nice to see this film in widescreen because the action suffered greatly from being cropped. The version I caught was the full screen print released by Mill Creek. The film would look so much better in widescreen with the original language and subtitles. Also when a film is dubbed and there's a translator character it doesn't make any sense. If every ones dubbed in English it just does not work at all. You end of having the translator just repeat what another character has said in the same language. The soundtrack is as about original as the plot. They have sampled a funky seventies Issac Hayes number called *Part Time Love* for the background music. The instrumental version they use makes a strangely effective soundtrack to the visuals. *Infernal Street* is a good little Hong Kong Martial Arts film that is far from perfect but still manages to entertain. If you enjoy the independent films of the early 70's I'd recommend giving it a chance.

**Inheritor of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1981: Pao Hsueh-Li) - aka The Heroic One; Soul Collector** - One of several non-Shaw Brothers films starring Ti Lung and a predominantly Taiwanese crew. Based on a Jin Yong "mo hop" novel, this story bears some similarity to the 1990s Jet Li feature *"Kung Fu Cult Master"*, and also involves warring clans and an innocent (Ti Lung) who gets tossed out of one clan and gets tangled up in an intrigue. This film is an appealing mix of old style kung fu and fantasy. The story moves along well enough so that you forgive the cheesy sets and occasional 1970s special effects. Plenty of action. Most notable feature: Ti Lung's crisp, overtly wing chun hand techniques. The final battle royal is worth the wait and is nonstop empty hand, kicking and weapons action. There are two villains who are excellent kickers (one is a tae kwon do specialist has appeared in other Taiwanese films such as *"Blood Child"*). Pearl Cheung Ling has a small non-action role.

**Instant Kung Fu Man (Hong Kong, 1977: Richard Tung)** - *INSTANT FUNG FU MAN* (1978) is a minor kung fu film that deserves attention for two reasons. It's an early work of action direction/fight choreography by Yuen Wo Ping (better known for *THE MATRIX* and *CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON*), who shares credit here with his brother Yuen Cheung Yan (who recently did the fights for *CHARLIE'S ANGELS*). It also features a pair of fights between the two greatest high-kickers in the genre, Hwang Jang Lee and John Liu, two pairs of the longest legs in kung fu.

The plot focuses on identical twins Shao Fu and Shao Hu, one of whom--Shao Fu--is a kung fu expert, but a bandit, while the other--Shao Hu--is a Shaolin monk, but a completely undisciplined slacker. The focus is more on Shao Hu who gets to leave Shaolin Temple after defeating the Shaolin Wooden Men with a clever trick that makes for one of the funniest bits in the film.



The emphasis is on comedy as Shao Hu is constantly mistaken for his wanted brother and must use his wits to either win fights or get out of them. The plot gets convoluted as more and more new characters get introduced, including Ah Sam (Yuen Yat Chor, one of the Yuen brothers), who begs to be Shao Hu's student, even though he himself is far superior in kung fu, and a young lady who becomes Ah Sam's wife after he beats her in a match.

There are some trademark Yuen Wo Ping kung fu sight gags, including a fight with a ladder, and comic bits involving a merchant trying to marry off his fat daughter to Shao Hu after hiring him to fight off bandits. However, the comedy starts to get tiresome and the film perks up only in the last 20 minutes when Hwang Jang Lee and John Liu re-enter (after short bits early on) and proceed to kick the crap out of each other. These are two of the best kickers in kung fu films and their two fights are enormously exciting. In a fight with Shao Fu, the kung fu twin, Hwang does his famous triple kick maneuver without wires or trampoline.

Yip Fei Yang plays the two twins and is actually a pretty good actor and fighter. Unfortunately, the emphasis is on the comic brother, so we don't get to see the actor do enough kung fu. The music score consists of cues from HOW THE WEST WAS WON (1962) and 'Roots' (1977), with an inexplicable refrain of the 'Dixie' anthem throughout.

**Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan (Hong Kong, 1972: Chor Yuen)** - Eighteen year old AINU (Lily Ho) is kidnapped and sold to a brothel. Her good looks and wild personality make her very popular with the lustful clients, but also draws the lesbian attentions of brothel madam Betty Tei Pei. Betty teaches AINU the ways of lust and the ways of kung fu, and AINU becomes more and more similar to her captor. But rage at her treatment is still burning inside her.

INTIMATE CONFESSIONS... ("AINU" is the Chinese title) is another wu xia film from ace director Chor Yuen, but this time the exploitation angle often present in his films is brought right into centre stage. Chor Yuen seems to have been fascinated by lesbians, but this is the only film of his that I've seen where he gives them the starring roles. Both Lily Ho and Betty Pei Ti give sterling performances as the beautiful but vicious martial arts hookers, and they're joined by a cast of Shaws starlets in the nude to create a pre-Cat III film that balances action, intrigue and eroticism surprisingly well. The film is the acknowledged inspiration for Clarence Fok's NAKED KILLER, the ultimate Cat III classic.

As with all Chor Yuen's films, AINU is filmed entirely on Shaw Brothers sound stages, and features his trademark opulent art direction and cinematography. The plot is less labyrinthine than in many of his wu xia works, probably because Gu Long was in no way involved. In fact, the plot is probably too straight forward - the film runs less than 90 minutes, and doesn't develop its characters or situations as much as I would have liked. It still has a certain amount of depth and sophistication that is exceptionally unusual in a film centred on sex.

Yueh Hua has a small role as a hapless police officer, but it's undoubtedly the women that are the stars of the film. Even in the action scenes, which are not the main focus but are a pleasant bonus, it's Lily Ho and especially Betty Tei Pei that dominate. Given that neither of the ladies are martial artists they do a good job in the fights, with stunt doubles being noticeable but not distracting.

Ultimately it's the characters and the situations that make the film interesting, and the art direction, cinematography and naked flesh that make it compelling. I enjoyed the film on a number of levels, and even my girlfriend was positively disposed towards it. I just wish it had been about 30 minutes longer, and spent a bit more time developing its story.

**Invincible, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Law Chun)** - Long forgotten and lost Jimmy Wang Yu swordplay movie until a German, widescreen cinema print turned up and was released on dvd, it's a shame such gems remain forgotten for so long as The Invincible is a definite highlight in Jimmy Wang Yu's literally kickass filmography. Playing Li Mu Bai whose people are oppressed by the evil Mongol ruler Wan Yan Liang (Paul Chang), earlier Li saves woman Wan Yan Chang (Helen Ma - Deaf Mute Heroine) but when finding out she's the sister of Yan Liang, a conflict of interests arises. Especially so since the two have a growing affection in each other where that is entirely impossible. It's about doing good for your people after they've been violated so the moral dilemmas are certainly familiar but executed with sincerity by director Law Chun (who had directed Jimmy in My Son at Shaw Brothers). Also devoid of much pretension since it's not a history lesson too, The Invincible is refreshingly straightforward and simple with that simple complexity joining hands too. Although visibly undercranked, the swordplay and the various group battles are exciting and often extensive, complex pieces of furious choreography where Wang Yu puts his all into said furious emotion needed.

**Invincible Armour (Hong Kong, 1977)** - John Liu plays a General Chow who witnesses a man being chased by bandits. Impressed with his skills, he invites him to be recruited to fight with the Ming Rebels. It turns out to be a setup when the man kills his master and the General is framed for his murder. Decried a traitor, General Chow flees for his life while trying to prove his innocence by capturing the true murderer. The murderer seeks refuge with his compatriots but is found by his old teacher, who uses him for his own ends. Meanwhile, the Minister of State (HJL) uses every resource to track down Chow, who he blames for the murder. To assist in this, he calls upon Shen Yu (TW), a skilled kung fu expert to track him down and kill him. Shen Yu manages to find Chow but his innate sense of honor allows Chow to stall for time to track down the real killer. The murderer leads them both towards the mastermind behind the plot, an Invincible Armour and Eagle Claw master. Who could this be??!?

This is my first John Liu film but certainly not my first Yuen Woo Ping film. The plot of this movie is solid and hangs on intrigue and political maneuvering. It certainly is bit better than the usual revenge stories but it ultimately is just that. What really makes it stand out is the relatively high-caliber cast which gives this movie its spark. Putting HJL in the silver fox role is like fishing with dynamite- guaranteed success. I don't know if there's anything else to say except that I like how he restricted his style to Eagle Claw until the end fights where he unleashes his devastating arsenal of kicks. Lee Hoi San is good in a pivotal role as the murderer and you get to see his expertise early on in the film. This guy should have the equivalent of a Best Supporting Actor Oscar in kung fu for all his excellent support roles. I think this is the first time I've seen Tino Wong in a movie (not sure...) but his greatest asset is his screen presence. While he is noticeably doubled for some fight scenes involving weapons and acrobatics, his persona is suitably somber and restrained. He *looks* like you shouldn't mess with him. Phillip Ko is the other silver fox, a brother to the Minister of State who covets his power. Solid acting and he has some crazy eyes that are really expressive- you can always tell when he looks pissed!

And finally, John Liu. To me, he's a mixed bag in where you have a charismatic charm, goofy smile, excellent legwork (wow, he really uses his right leg a lot) and good physicality combined with a slightly wooden acting style, some Bruce-style expressions (in vogue at the time), and at times a painful earnestness (maybe a character thing, I don't know). His kicks are dramatic and quick, however, I can see how an AC might have to work with him to mix it up a bit. I liked him in this role but to be honest, it felt like about ten minutes could have cut from this movie, most of them with him in it. Parts with the girl and her brother were essential for the plot but a little silly. His build-up to the end fight where he encounters the Yuen brothers as the Band of Three(?) displays some excellent weapons skill work, of course, but it went on a little long (can't believe I just typed that). And what the hell did they have to do with this plot?!? Typical Yuen randomness, for sure.

Other things that I liked- well, HJL. It was like he was born for these roles. His athleticism, skill, and glowering charisma bleed off the screen. I almost found it sweet when he said he would kill the murderer with one blow, so quick and accurate he wouldn't feel a thing! Awwww! His Eagle Claw looks top notch but I certainly wouldn't know. And I love these movies where the one vulnerable point has to be found- why do they always show eggs dropping and breaking to stand in for a man's sac? It makes it even worse to watch IMO!

As for things I didn't care for, well, the direction and cinematography are pretty amateur at times. The direction, I should clarify, is solid enough but there are obvious shortcomings. Unnecessary close-ups, close-ups that crops part of the face, film stock that changes color, and odd camera angles contribute to a feeling that this was done on the cheap. It isn't overwhelming but it distracts from the movie at times. And I loved how the \*\*\*SPOILER\*\*\* kid and his sister drop in at the last second to help the heroes out. These movies definitely have their share of deus ex machinas but this just bugged me. \*\*\*END SPOILER\*\*\*. It doesn't help that this release (VideoAsia) suffers from poor audio (volume goes in and out) and poor-to-fair video transfer. Another Woo Ping movie in need of a good release (**Dance of the Drunk Mantis** please!).

Overall, a pretty good movie with a really good cast and some great action scenes. My favorite scenes are the last fight for sure and the dust-ups between John Liu and Tino Wong. I wished they could have used Lee Hoi San more in the action department, well, because we all know he's pretty good. And another Yuen Woo Ping movie that should be essential viewing.

**Invincible Eight (Hong Kong, 1981: Lo Wei)** - There are a number of things that contributed to making this a fairly tiresome film for 120 minutes of its 135 minute running time. The main problem is that the Invincible Eight are far from invincible. In every fight until the final one, they get pretty badly beaten up. Then when they confront the main villain, they need all eight of them to subdue him.

Another main problem is that this film had no sub-titles. It was kind of nice not having to hear some torturously bad dubbing, but there is a lot of talking going on in this film and I may as well have been on Mars for all I understood of the plot. In fact there was way too much conversing for a film with a title like this has. I felt like I was at my grandmothers when I was a child and having to sit around and listen to the adults chat for hours until I finally got to eat the apple pie. That's how painful it is getting to the final fight.

So since I have no idea what the story was about besides the fact that these eight individuals seem to be a bit miffed at some fellow – and finally join forces to fight him. That's it. That's all I could understand. So lets focus on the action and on Angela Mao.

Angela looks great in this film. She has wonderful fashion sense here and wears this headpiece that is sort of kung-fu meets the flying nun. I didn't realize for much of the film that she is disguised as a male. She does this in a few films and all I can say is that either people must have been very unobservant in those days or there were a lot of very feminine guys running around. Of course most of us don't view an Angela Mao film for fashion tips – it's watching her in action that gets our blood boiling. There is not a lot of blood boiling material here. In a few scenes she has brief fights utilizing her fan and then in the big finale she sort of gets lost in the crowd. A major disappointment especially considering how poorly the other so called Invincible Eight fight.

None of the individual fights are very compelling. Basically Pai Ying and his minions surround them and whip them into submission (look for Sammo as one of the white clad whippers). When they do fight, they look so slow that I think I could take them with my tennis racket on a good day. Not exciting stuff. In the end there is a good fight as the eight of them storm the castle of the bad guys, slice their way through the minions, take on Pai Ying and then finally Han Ying Chieh. It is worth mentioning that one of the Invincible 8 is Nora Miao of Bruce Lee fame.

This is a fairly early Angela Mao film – before her classics – so don't expect a lot.

**Invincible Enforcer (Hong Kong, 1979: Cheng Kang)** - Jiang Chai (Tony Liu) is a happy man with a beautiful wife, a steady job and a child on the way; but his happiness becomes short lived when he accidentally disrespects a ruthless police officer. The situation becomes overblown and Jiang is unfairly sentenced to 20 months in prison.

What follows is a living hell for Jiang. In addition to being bullied by inmates, he also has to deal with a corrupt prison guard with a personal agenda; as well as a powerful gangster named Big Brother Long, who controls all of the criminal activity inside the prison.

By the time his 20 year term is over, Jiang tries his hardest to live a decent life. However, his time in prison effects any normality he tries to lead, so he decides there's no choice but to live a life of crime to earn a living.

*Invincible Enforcer* is one crazy ride.

It's filled with over-the-top brutality, peculiar situations and an unforgiving plot that pulls no punches. Even though most of it takes place in prison, it's too jumpy to be considered a 'prison' flick. There are so many bizarre moments this film offers that it's in a league of its own. Some of the movie is corny, some of it is serious, and sometimes, it's like, "what the fuck?"

Towards the very beginning, just as new inmates are getting ready to get physically checked, one guy accidentally relaxes a little too much and sprays a doctor's face with fecal matter. Soon after, we are treated to a scene where our main character has the choice of either drinking piss or taking a beating. There's also a scene that involves James Bond-style mice - a silly, out of place moment that you'll have to see for yourself to believe.

Although *Invincible Enforcer* stars martial arts heavy Tony Liu (as well as a cameo by Chen Kuan Tai), keep in mind, there's not a single scene of kung fu at any given time. There is action, but most of it involves prison brawls, bloody beatings and a quick shoot-out (and beheading) towards the end of the movie.

If you're familiar with Cheng Kang's work, the rough film editing should come to no surprise. I've noticed it in *Sword of Swords*, *The Twelve Gold Medallions* and *Killers Five*. Even though some of it feels rushed, it never harms the greatness of this or any of his films. In a way, I consider the rugged editing in his films more of a trademark, than a flaw.

I'd rate this movie a little higher if those damn mice didn't make a cameo. Otherwise, it's a decent flick.

**Invincible Fist, The (Hong Kong, 1969: Chang Cheh)** - An entertaining lesser known film from director Chang Cheh that is a good combination of action and drama. Lo Lieh is the leader of a small band of bounty hunters on the trail of a murderous group of thieves who have managed to keep their identity secret. The bandit leader (Fang Mian) is actually hiding pretty much in plain sight by virtue of his age and demeanour. The films opening credits and music evoke feelings of a Western in their style, and some of the action is outdoor and in inclement weather. The first half of the film is pretty much standard fare for the director, with plenty of action and story development.

It is in the final part of the film where the director provides the dramatic tension when the wounded Tieh Wu-Ching (Lo Lieh) stumbles across the bandit leaders home and his blind daughter Kuei Ku (Li Ching). The actress provides a convincing portrayal of the blind girl who worships her father, completely ignorant of the villainous life he leads away from home. Her world is a dream-like fantasy of beautiful flowers and a kind father, an idyllic existence. Here the director uses metaphors to symbolise her plight - the ferocious wolf that still loves its young (in reference to her father) and the rainstorm stripping petals off the flowers (the fragility of her world). In contrast to the directors later works, here the female is not the source of male destruction. Through her we see a softer side of her villainous father, and the bounty hunter is so moved by her plight/innocence that he continues the subterfuge to protect her from the ugly truth. I thought it unfortunate that her fathers love for her was insufficient to prevent his choosing a life of crime, but then we wouldn't have had a story. Sadly, some of the most accomplished martial artists in these films lose sight of the founding principles in their pursuit of power, putting innocent members of their own family at risk.

In his brotherhood and venom's movies it has been claimed that the director simply doesn't know how to film female actresses, relegating them to wallflowers or using them simply as a destructive force to the male brotherhood. Based on this and other early works, I am not so sure. The female characters seem to be well rounded and respectfully portrayed. I think simply the directors emphasis changed as he was allowed to develop his style, and audience preferences moved away from the Yin toward the Yang.

**Invincible Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1979: To Man Bo) - aka Ruthless Revenge; The Two Tricky Kids** - Men are gambling on a small boat. Hon Kwok-Choi flashes a wad of cash and Ku Feng creates a disturbance to steal it. Bruce Leung, with eyeglasses and a missing tooth, is accused and they fight. Ashore they both are hired as the new kung fu teacher and continue to fight. Bolo is the bad guy responsible for the death of the previous teacher. The protection guys are making rounds and the deaf mute student beats them. Bolo is angry. The girl, Mei Mei, beats up both our two guys. Exposed as fakes, she warns them to get out of town before they get killed like her father. Yet they keep beating up every challenger Bolo sends. However, Bolo clobbers them both. So they combine skills, Bruce can only kick and Hon Kwok-Choi can only punch.

One joke does not make a comedy movie. This movie has one joke, repeated for about 50 minutes. At that point the drunken master enters the story. Our guys are run out of town and they meet up with Ku Feng again. Now we have a trio with Ku Feng as their teacher. First a warning, fast forward past the animal cruelty scene at about 1:05:00 first.

Any fan of these movies recognizes the names and faces of Ku Feng, Bruce Leung Siu-Lung and Hon Kwok-Choi. They were among the greatest of this genre so how bad can any movie be with all three of them starring? This is how bad. Any one not a fan of this genre could never sit through this movie. Though it is a pleasure to watch them in action it is just the same action over and over and they have done it all better in other movies.

**Invincible Kung Fu Trio (Taiwan, 1978: Joe Law) - aka Dragon's Fatal Fist** - A film that does great injustice to 3 very talented performers, this 1974 Taiwanese production is shot with a low budget, and that shows throughout the film. It is based about the age old tried and tested "good" Shaolin vs the "evil" Wutang tradition.

Meng Fei stars as Fong Sai Yuk, the cult hero as the leader of ex-shaolin fighters who include the Northern Leg Zen master himself John Liu as Hung Si Kwan set upon overthrowing the evil Chings, who are protected by the Wutang clan, led by the White/Black hair Abbot played by Kam Kong in one of his better fighting roles. Angela Mao also stars in the film, playing Wing Chun, a daughter of one of the rebels.

The films suffers from poor editing, and cut scenes. The middle part of the film when John Liu gets in the fight with Kam Kong mysteriously fails to show how he was captured. The film did not use any of John Liu's ability as a

superkicker, and for some reason, bar about 5 minutes of the film which show him practising, he was given a punching role; something he is not adapt to.

In the end the 3 fighters fight their "Doubles", in the fight which lasts about 3 minutes, and easily overpower them. This does not showcase anyone's ability. The end fight against Kam Kong (Who mysteriously has his hair turn from black to white without any explanation) was poor, but I did think that Kam Kong performed quite well, in accordance with his ability anyway.

Overall this film is terrible considering the high profile cast that they employed. Shabby editing, and performance make this film a miss. Interestingly this film has "Chen Kuan Tai" billed as the lead star, but he does not even feature in the film!!!!

**Invincible Obsessed Fighter (South Korea, 1982: Kim Jung-Yong) - a.k.a Mu-Rim Beggar Warriors** - Fat Ho (Kim Yong Wan) is a Martial Arts Master & supporter of the righteous General Ching. One of Ching's rivals Eagle, hires a skilled stone cold killer to seek out Ho and murder him. Only Ho has a son (Elton Chong), armed with the Eight Chopper Fist style he aims to deal with the killer and the man who hired him.

This film is by far the craziest I've reviewed for this month's Filmark special. It had to be most far out with the king of old school Korean Kung Fu comedy Elton Chong (The Snake Strikes Back) being the star. He might not be the most popular old school screen fighter, but in this film he does show off some nice Martial Arts skills between the over the top slapstick routines. There are some really talented Martial Artists who I sadly cannot identify in this production. Some of the faces I've seen before in smaller roles in other Korean flicks. Only finding information about them online has in some cases been impossible. Some of these guys have really amazing kicking skills that helped raise the quality of the fight scenes. In some cases I'll describe them by their appearance onscreen rather than reference them by name. One of the talents I can name is Fei Wan who plays the stony faced killer hired to kill Fat Ho. Wan shows off some great skills that make you wish he'd had a longer film career. This was his second and last appearance on screen. His other role being in the similar Magnificent Natural Fist, that almost has the exact same cast too. His character is introduced by fighting his way through the gang leaders lackeys in a nicely choreographed sequence. One highlight see's him deal with three fighters at the same time. His encounter with Fat Ho is another stand out moment including the gruesome use of a clothes line.

This brings me onto the subject of the films highly energetic Martial Arts action. Some fans might not like the slapstick or the under cranking, which can be a bit too much at times. If you can overlook this or don't mind it then you will be treated to some great moves and decent choreography. The movie's villain played by Mike Wong Lung, is also the film's sole fight choreographer. He does a fine job here but sometimes the quality is a little inconsistent. The hit or miss comedy and slapstick being the main cause of this. What helps is the high standard of some of the performers in the smaller roles. A lot of these Filmark movies have some really poor and inept villains. Invincible Obsessed Fighter thankfully does not suffer from this. Mike Wong is more than capable as a screen villain who has a worthy assortment of back up. One of the lackeys that sports a big 70's style hair cut in the film, shows off some very skillful and well executed leg work. I think he's played by Joo Ki Wan but I'm not 100% sure so don't quote me on that one. One good example of his ability can be seen when he confronts Elton Chong about not having a permit for fortune telling. There's also a shaven headed lackey who sports some of the most outrageous facial hair I've ever set eyes on. He has side burns that could be almost as lethal as his boot work. This guy is also equally gifted with some exceptional kicking skills. At first I thought it may have been Jack Lam but after seeing the whole film I wasn't too sure. Anyone else on the forum know who the above two guys might be?. The final showdown gives you your money's worth with the two leads putting on a better than average performance. With Lung's skillful villain looking like he could beat Chong's lesser skilled hero. It this underdog versus the super skilled fighter theme that's been the highlight of many of Jackie Chan's films. Elton Chong made his living trying to replicate Chan's style for Korean audiences, and he does it effectively in this fight. He really shows off some good looking kicks, especially in the film's final chapter.

As you might expect there's no shortage of odd characters and random moments in this film. There's a scene where a young girl in drag is seen hitting pine cones with some odd looking floppy bat. Chan Lau Lei plays the young girl who befriends and helps Elton Chong's character. She doesn't appear to be a Martial Artist but she did have a brief but short movie career in the early to mid 80's. Then there's Kim Wong Yan's maggot eating wizard or the ghost fighter as he's referred to. He's hired to deal with the hero of the story and walks around with half of his body tanned. I'm not sure if that's a side effect of his odd eating habits or just lazy sunbathing?. He has a strange style of fighting that's very stiff and robotic. Like Chong's Eight Chopper Fist style it's never really explained. This is one of the few Asian Kung Fu flicks I've sat through that does not feature any traditional training sequences. Which is why we don't get much detail about the fictional techniques on display. There's also a hunchback ginseng expert that appears to be hiding a replica of Mount Everest under his shirt. Sadly he has little more than a short minor role.

There's a scene where our hero uses a large bush to disguise himself. It reminded me of the moving forest sequence in Roman Polanski's big screen version of Macbeth. Only the scene in *Invincible Obsessed Fighter* is much funnier. Any Filmark movie would not be complete without some hooded assailants. They attempt to retrieve some gold that's been hustled from their boss. Is it me or do all these films have to feature some scenes featuring men in hoods/masks of some kind?.

My expectations were very low for this south Korean production, but I found myself being surprised in a good way. Sure there's no shortage of faults you can pick with it. Many of the film's problems can clearly be seen if you ever get round to seeing this. The comedy can be too grating and the story's all over the place due to weak direction. Director Kim Jung-Yong did a better job with *Ninja VS Shaolin Guards* (1984) though he did share directing duties on that one. The soundtracks nothing special with the *Taxi Driver* & *Once Upon Time In The West* scores getting used yet again. Yet I still found this film to be the most entertaining of all the Filmark productions I've covered this month. This movie might be short on classy production values, but it's not short on crisp kicking action either. Which makes it worth a watch for any old school Korean film fans.

**Invincible Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1978: Chang Cheh) - aka Unbeatable Dragon** - Solid and satisfying Shaw Brothers production in which an evil Ching dynasty warlord (Wang Lung Wei) pits three northern Shaolin court instructors against a group of south Shaolin masters, hoping to trigger a bloody feud. Action and training scenes galore. Notable performance by Sun Chien, who plays a refined and diplomatic Ti Lung type of character. Sun (as usual) is the kicker. The rest of the well-known Venoms cast play experts in light skill, power, mantis, pole, two-section long staff, and wing chun (Wei Pai). As was the case with the film "Shaolin Martial Arts" almost of the "Shaolin" style depicted are more fantastical rather than authentic. For instance, the mantis training scenes, in which the Venom trains by pulling giant rubber bands isometrically, are quite ridiculous and have nothing to do with true preying mantis style whatsoever. And the wing chun training (breaking out of an enclosed wooden box) is somewhat philosophically true to (some) wing chun principles, but pure fantasy. Typically violent, gory and dark Chang Cheh finale should please hardcore Shaw Brothers fans.

**Invincible Super Chan - (Taiwan, 1971: Sun Yang) – aka Forced to Fight** - I've been intrigued by this ever since it was featured in the recent BBC Choice TV series 'Stop Kung Fu'. Unfortunately I've been quite unable so far to find out much about it other than it was banned in more than thirty countries. While it does contain quite an extensive amount of bloodletting it's not to the same extent of the 'Lone Wolf and Cub' series and I doubt that there would be much to trouble censors nowadays.

The plot is about as straight forward as it gets. Chan is a powerful kung fu swordsman single minded in his mission of revenge against the gang that killed his master. However violence begets violence and after he has carried out vengeance against those responsible this only brings more people after him; a swordsman known as 'the playboy' who wishes to challenge him and the friends, including an army general, and family of the gang leader that he has just killed. Chan tries to settle down with a family, giving up his sword, but is forced to fight again when his daughter is murdered and his wife taken hostage leading to the bloodfilled finale.

There really is little more to this film than fight scene after fight scene. The choreography is typical for kung fu movies of the early seventies/late sixties looking rather less polished but full of energy. I couldn't decide whether the film suffered from bad editing at the hands of the filmmakers themselves or censors. At times the editing [of the version I was watching (Dutch)] made it difficult to follow quite what was happening. Even if the film had been cut there was still plenty of gore as Chan slashed his way through wave after wave of attackers, managing at one point to cut one opponent vertically in half. Even when Chan loses an arm in the final duel he is quite unstoppable.

Production values are not quite high enough to make the violence convincing with obvious dummies being thrown around here and there. This cheapness actually added to my enjoyment (for all the wrong reasons) and I imagine this would be a great film to watch with a large audience.

**Invincible Super Guy, The (Taiwan, 1976: Hsu Tseng-Hung)** - Starting out reasonably interesting, with Lung Fei's character orchestrating the theft of royal gold and then tries to divert attention and blame onto other people. This then grinds to a halt as now the narrative becomes riddled with characters and coherent reasons for anything vanishes quickly. Main reason being how Hsu Tseng-Hung (Temple Of The Red Lotus) deals with exposition dumps designed to BRING clarity. It's all simply spoken, unnaturally so and when filmmaker shows no interest in achieving clarity, no wonder we also tune out. Strange sights such as an undead, protective army around our villain Devilman entertain for a few minutes but doesn't elevate matters. Martial arts is unfortunately also sluggish and largely uninteresting. Starring Polly Kwan, Chang Yi and Pai Ying.

**Invisible Terrorist (Taiwan, 1976: Chan Siu-Pang)** - The story starts off as your typical rebel name list hunt, but has a couple twists to spruce things up, and is backed by pretty solid acting.. The list is divided among 3 of the rebels(Carter, Man Kong Lung, Cliff Lok), which makes for some interesting twists, although the PRIMARY plot twist is maybe a little predictable. Wang Hsieh is the main baddie,(Qing General) and Kam Kong is his right hand man, along with Lung Fei in more of a cameo role. To complicate things, there is a masked character also trying to obtain the namelist(s)....BUT WHO IS IT?!? In the midst of the rebels and Qings, there are of course Monks siding with the rebels, and a neutral "White Flower" group... Yeah it seems complicated, but is surprisingly well done and not too confusing..

There is a silly amount of allegiance changes, but right as they begin to become excessive, the (mostly) true intentions of the characters are brought to light, and the twists actually make sense, and don't seem forced! This reminds me, there is one twist, at the VERY end, that is kind of silly; and its only purpose was to seemingly make a "happy ending".. Which is a shame, because directly prior to that the movie takes a dark turn, which I found to be very cool and one of the best parts of the movie. . Oh well. :/

The fights are good, with a mix of nice swordplay and hand to hand action. Carter Wong's lack of fluidity is even more apparent when using a weapon, but it kind of works in this... He wields a short rod, and his clunkiness gives off a savage look when he fights with it. There are some silly Monks who fight with cymbals, but it's good for some camp humor, although it gets a little tiresome. None of the cast truly stand out in the action department, although I'd like to make note of Kam Kong.. It was cool to see him in Qing general garb, as he usually plays some sort of low class character, he also put on a good fighting and acting performance. Lo Lieh just has a cameo (AS A GOOD GUY!?), but its one of the best action scenes of the movie for sure, he shows some good swordplay here. Every one turns in a pretty good acting performance, and Wang Hsieh is good as the main heavy. The action was pretty "hard hitting", and lot of different angles and perspectives are used which I enjoy when used effectively.

There were some fantastic sets and locations, as well as nice costumes. This movie must have had a somewhat decent budget for a Taiwanese production. The soundtrack was mostly OKAY, but had a few really nice moments during the dark part of the ending, an eerie track during some flashback scenes, and some nice ambient "spooky" wind scenes. The dub was pretty good, and humorous at times. There were a lot of "traitorous dogs", lol.

So a very enjoyable movie from Chan Siu Pang, with a decent take on the oft-used name list McGuffin, some solid action, and a very good cast. Kam Kong's small but great performance makes it worth seeing alone IMO, but it is a pretty good indie all around. The twists become a little too much, some are predictable, and the "happy ending twist" was frustrating... But I still recommend it. I watched a pretty crappy version on youtube, and it had some "shaky" looking parts, but I am sure they are just from the transfer. I would definitely watch this one again if I could find a better version.

**Iron Dragon Strikes Back (Hong Kong, 1979: Kueh Chih Hung)** – aka **The Gold Connection**- Ho Chung Tao in the late 70s finally got a chance to step out of the Bruce Lee exploitation genre. Making a handful of films that had no connection to the little dragon at all. This finally gave him the chance to showcase his true talents and create his own screen image. He was a capable gymnast and martial artist before entering into films. He studied many forms of Martial Arts Wing Chun, Judo, Tae Kwan Do to name a few. Born in Taiwan he later moved to Hong Kong and became involved with movies. From bit parts and stunts he moved onto leading roles as a Bruce Lee look-a-like.

Iron Dragon Strikes Back was made around 1979/80 and has a contemporary urban setting. It doesn't feature a lot of humor often associated with these films either. This is much darker and serious than many of the Kung Fu films of the era. Any laughs are not intentional but due to the low budget of the movie. Ho Chung Tao and his friends stumble upon some gold whilst diving in the ocean. They throw the gold back into the sea fearing it's connected to the HK underworld. Two of Ho's friends change their minds and go back to retrieve the gold and sell it. The gangsters who left the gold there soon find out and come after them. Soon fists are flying and the four friends are fighting to survive.

A dark and gritty picture shot mainly during the winter time judging by the weather conditions. It's not a very upbeat film but a more serious martial arts/crime movie. There's many well staged fights scenes, and some really stand out moments. The final fight scene being one of those stand out moments. Both Phillip Ko & Ho Chung Tao do a

great job of appearing to be desperate to stay alive as they go head to head. The ending is not the usual predictable outcome either which is a big bonus.

**Iron Fisted Eagle's Claws (Taiwan, 1979: Do Liu Boh)** - The plot is relatively simple. During the Republic Era, a sheriff (Park Jong-Kuk of *Snake Strikes Back*) arrests some criminal who is the "Dai dai" (Cantonese for "little brother") of another criminal/kung fu teacher, played by the great Chen Sing. Not too long afterward, the same sheriff arrests two brothers (Chi Kuan-Chun and Leung Siu-Lung, who need no introduction here) who go around putting on kung fu demonstrations. Crime? Some rich guy was trying to force a lady's daughter into prostitution and Chi Kuan-Chun decided to show the crowd his kung fu was real by killing the bastard with a single punch (much like Hung Hey-Kwun, the founder of Hung Gar did). I think (I watched this in Mandarin without subs) this was actually a ploy for the Sheriff to get these two to follow him on his trip to escort that other criminal to the Republic Era equivalent to the penitentiary, because sure enough, some of Chen Sing's men show up to try to free the guy. The sheriff and Leung Siu-Lung fight off the thugs while Chi Kuan-Chun guarantees that the criminal doesn't run away of his own accord.

Upon arriving in the penitentiary, the sheriff frees our two heroes and sends them on their way. A few days later, Chen Sing's men sneak into the pitifully-guarded prison and free their compatriot. After that, the next item of business is to get revenge of the sheriff. They invade his household and kill his family (including his baby son), rape and murder his wife, and kill his younger brother (Gwok Mu-Seong, the hero of *Eagle vs. Silver Fox*, who puts up a pretty good fight). They then ambush the sheriff and maim him, keeping him captive. He escapes and is rescued by Leung and Chi, who fight off Cheng Sing's thugs. He's then nursed back to health by a drunken master (Philip Ko Fei in a cameo), while Chi and Leung train themselves to get revenge for their friend.

There's not much of a plot here, and costumes and sets are pretty threadbare, so you'll have to content yourself with the action. Thankfully, the film delivers. At first I was worried, since Leung Siu-Lung was playing the comic foil to Chi Kuan-Chun during their initial kung fu demonstration scenes. Thankfully, he plays it relatively straight in most of his fights and the film doesn't waste much time at all with drawn-out scenes of failed get-rich schemes and stuff like that. Chi Kuan-Chun uses his usual hung gar with emphasis on the Five Animals Form. His character is the straight man to Leung's goof, but he sometimes jokes around a little in his fights. I'm not sure if this is his best fight, but he does a good job with the animal styles and gets to show off some nice forms, too. Chen Sing doesn't have anything to do until the final fight, but he's his usual reliable self with this strong hand-based tiger claw attacks. He wears a metal claw on one hand during the climax, but it's not so much a gimmick as it is just a visual tic. Interestingly enough, Chi Kuan-Chun is also given an iron fist gauntlet to use in the later fights, but he almost forgets he has it until the end of the climatic fight. Sort of like how Ultraman never uses his ray attack until **\*after\*** he's done wrestling against his opponent.

Korean actors Park Jong-Kuk and Gwok Mu-Seong make strong showings for themselves. Park demonstrates some nice, powerful kicks, reminiscent of Kam Kong on his best days. His handwork is a bit stiff, reminiscent of Keanu Reeves in the Matrix movies. I'm sure that he practiced more of the kicking side of tae kwon do than anything else. Gwok Mu-Seong gets to fake a hung gar form in his initial appearance and then kicks up a storm once he faces off with Cheng Sing's ruffians. Sadly, he exits stage left after that fight.

Bruce Leung Siu-Lung pretty much steals the show here. Although he's the film designated kicker, he's versatile enough that he doesn't depend on his feet to sell his fights here, unlike Tan Tao-Liang and John Liu. His handwork—an eclectic mix of monkey kung fu, ying jao pai (Eagle's Claw), and wing chun—is actually more impressive than Chi Kuan-Chun's standard hung gar strikes. His kicking is interesting. You see, Dorian Tan and John Liu were masters of high kicks and kicking multiple times without lowering their legs. Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee could do it all. Leung Siu-Lung was more about the kicking combinations and chain kicks. Here, he unleashes barrages of roundhouse and spin kicks one after the other and it looks great. His performance certainly dwarfs that of *Fists, Kicks and Evils* and *Four Shaolin Challengers*, both of which were made around the same time.

Fans of the *Secret Rivals* films should easily find something to like here and, if you can get past the low production values, there's more than enough quality fighting to satisfy.

**Iron-Fisted Monk, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Sammo Hung)** — Sammo Hung is Luk, whose father was killed by Manchus. He is taken into a monastery and trained by his sifu (JT). The Manchus, specifically an official's son who is a rapist, are terrorizing the populace and Luk wants to seek revenge. Leaving the monastery, he is told to seek out a monk named Tak (Chen Sing). Together they bring an end to brutality of the Manchu official and his deviant son.

Opening Credits



Luk and a bald monk spar. This is classic "old school" choreography and Sammo uses some Tiger & Leopard styles here. This segues into a training session involving many monks at the monastery. While it's nothing extravagant, it's just some cool choreography.

#### Fight #1 --- Training challenge

Between Luk (using a single-edged sword) and his sifu (using a staff). There's good flow and speed. It's a fun fight with hints of intricacy.

#### Fight #2

This is a flashback of Luk's father being beaten and killed by some Manchu ruffians. Sammo takes a beating here. Then Tak arrives to defend him and drive them off. It's a short skirmish but there's some good stuff involved.

#### Fight #3 --- Another training challenge

Luk vs his sifu while monks call out the strategies of the techniques being employed. Sammo's balance during some of the postures amazes me.

#### Fight #4 --- Luk vs 3 Manchu thugs

Bullying 3 boys and slicing off their queues (ponytails), Sammo steps in and deftly handles them. It's short but very good as he dominates them easily. There's good flow and interchange between opponents.

#### Fight #5 --- Luk vs Manchu official's son's 5 man entourage

This takes place at a brothel. Great choreography here! Sammo displays fantastic agility. It's a good blend of comedy and fighting techniques. SH even uses one guy's fist to make him punch himself. There's great leg work as well. SH executes a sweet jump-spinning crescent kick at one point.

#### Fight #6

The Manchus attack an outdoor cloth factory. This is just all manner of kung fu mayhem on display.

#### Fight #7 --- End fight

Luk & Tak visit the Manchu official's residence. Dude! These 2 are just devastating! The choreography is great! There are some fantastic kicks here! They cream the Manchu henchmen easily. Then.....

Tak fights a Manchu who uses a metal ball attached to a thin chain. He turns that to his advantage and uses it against his foe, even killing him with it. It's harsh! I love it!

Luk fights 2 Manchus, one using a single-edged sword and wicker shield and the other a Chinese spear. He acquires the spear, kills the guy, and then duels the other. This is some sweet weapon choreography!

Next, Tak faces 2 Manchu imperial guards who use single-edged swords with elongated handles. Dispatching them, he then fight the Manchu official himself who uses Eagle Claw style against Tak's Snake style.

Luk fights the Manchu official's son who uses Mantis style. Luk counters with Leopard & Crane styles.

The fights overlap with a brief interchange of opponents to return to side-by-side duels. This is some outstanding kung fu with dazzling choreography. It's fast and hard and I can't even begin to parse out any one particular, standout move. The whole end fight is one big "rewind" moment!!!!

This is a different movie from Sammo Hung. While there are moments of comedy, it doesn't really play a major role here as in most of his period piece MA films. This has some darker moments and I warn you: there's a pretty graphic rape scene even by today's standards. The Manchu official's son is a particularly loathsome villain as a coldblooded rapist. The sets are great, especially the brothel. Sammo plays his role well, looking a bit wild and harried, but the

man can flat out fight. Chen Sing is amazing in his fights. The end fight is nothing but almost 15 minutes of awesomeness!

**Iron Man (Taiwan, 1973: Joseph Kuo) aka Chinese Iron Man** - Also known as Chinese Iron Man, Joseph Kuo doesn't complicate matters in this Fist Of Fury-like (very alike) basher where the evil Japanese and Chinese (the little, common man) clash. Main character Liang Hsiao Hu (Man Kong-Leung) is fed up with the Japanese hassling the staff at the local restaurant where he's the cook and proceeds to beat them up with a bit of Chinese fury. Now hunted, the clash also comes down to which martial arts school is the strongest, leading to a reel structured around the good ol' tournament fight...

Low budget and lacking care in the period detail (the police uniforms doesn't exactly fit the 1920-30s period the movie is set in), Kuo instead is content to let his action team loose in multiple, long scenes relying more on bashing than techniques. It's a bit draining but overall effectively furious as the story dictates.

**Iron Man, The (Taiwan, 1974: Chang Il-Ho) - aka A Dollar a Fist** - There really isn't a damn thing I can say about this movie other than it really, really sucks. I can't decide if this or A Man Called Tiger is the worst Jimmy Wang Yu film ever made. Maybe this. It took me almost a year to finish watching this horrible piece of tripe. I tried. I really tried, but after 15-20 minutes, I just had to turn it off, and I couldn't bring myself to watch it again for months.

Set during World war II, Jimmy is at his Japanese-hating worst as a man who gets his hand chopped off by rotten Japanese scoundrels. Yep. Jimmy is doing the one-armed thing again, only this movie is so weak, he doesn't even sacrifice a whole arm for it. In fact, once he gets a black glove, his hand seems to magically reappear.

The film is filled mostly with Jimmy seeking revenge against the Japanese. He does this by swinging his arms furiously at them, and they swing their arms back. The whole thing swung me into a pleasant sleep where I dreamed I was doing something more enjoyable than watching Iron Man, like getting my kneecaps hammered on by mafia thugs.

**Iron Mistress (Taiwan, 1969: Sung Chen-Sau) aka Iron Petticoat** - The mix of a rebel fighting against oppressors-story gets for at least a few reels a character spin worthy of admiration. Sung Chuen-Sau, director of Brigitte Lin's debut movie Outside The Window, adheres to genre staples technically by having classical Chinese instruments on the soundtrack to add beats to the action (which is intense and often excellent for 1969). Also showcasing a well-directed and shot movie, the best stretch comes during a story-strand where Iron Lady (Han Hsiang-Chin) is contemplating how she and others around her should should firmly decide upon issues of a common life. Essentially, how to choose a man, even under these circumstances. Combine it with an atmospheric attack on their camp and you have a standout movie that unfortunately doesn't live up to this potential as it rolls along. Dealing with possible alliances, betrayal etc, it may culminate in a fine finale but it's also downright confusing to follow to an extent that hurt matters enough. Partially successful doesn't in this case get you a higher score. Also starring King Hu regular Pai Ying.

**Iron Monkey (Taiwan, 1977: Chen Kuan-Tai)** - I got this for Christmas back in 1998 and dismissed it as being "too slow" (the choreography, not the pacing) when I saw it. Revisiting it almost 20 years later, I respect the film a lot more than I did back then. Long story short: Chen Kuan Tai plays a wastrel named "Iron" whose father is part of your average anti-Qing movement. One of the rebels (Wilson Tong) is actually a Qing agent in disguise and Iron's family is arrested and subsequently executed. Iron is left to fend for himself, and goes to the forest near Shaolin to live and forage for food. One of the laymen studying there, played by Chi Kuan-Chun, invites him to the temple to study. After basic training, he goes to the East Chamber to study the Monkey Fist with the "bitter monk". Several years later, he completes his training and goes undercover as a Qing enforcer in order to ferret out the warlord (played by Kam Kong) who ordered his family's execution.

The plot is no great shakes, and in the end, the film is mainly a showcase for Chen Kuan-Tai's monkey fu skills, which he picked up from Grandmaster Chan Sau-Chung. The choreography here is furnished by Chan Muk-Chuen, who worked on films like *The Crippled Masters*, *Guy with Secret Kung Fu*, and even choreographed himself as a monkey fist fighter in *Monkey Fist*, *Floating Snake*. Moreover, he teamed up a second time with Chen Kuan-Tai for *Duel at Tiger Village*, which was released on VHS as *Iron Monkey Strikes Back*. Chan Muk-Chuen is a competent

choreographer who gets the essence of the shapes and styles he depicts down pat, but I think he's restricted by budget and tight shooting schedules. He also seems to eschew undercranking in any form, so the fights feel slower than stuff like *Knockabout* and *Stroke of Death*.

There's quite a bit of action--the last 20 minutes are non-stop fighting, as Chen Kuan Tai takes on a series of mini-bosses, including Leung Kar-Yan and Wilson Tong, before ultimately taking on the eagle claw master, Kam Kong. Leung Kar-Yan's and Wilson Tong's fights feel a bit generic, as their styles are nondescript. Chi Kuan Chun also doesn't get much fight time, so his five animals style is largely ignored. While Kam Kong does some Northern Eagle's Claw (I assume), he comes across as being rather stiff because of his size. He did better work in *The Crane Fighter* and *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*. The real star is Chen Kuan Tai, who gives his monkey fist style a great showcase, even if he looks almost as stiff as Kam Kong does. He also does some work with a spear and a three-section staff in some of the fights. As I said, his fights seem to be fine on the technical side, but are lacking in some of the energy that set apart the very best work of Sammo, Woo-Ping, the Lau Clan and Jackie Chan. It's worth a view, though.

**Iron Neck Li (Taiwan, 1981: Cheung Yan Git) – aka Kung Fu Forever** - 'Iron Neck' Li Yung (Chi Kuan Chun) earned his nickname by using his fists to stand up for the weak and persecuted. Li Yung becomes the bodyguard of young Emperor Chien Lung after His Majesty stands up for him when he was wrongly accused of killing a man. The pair set out on an adventure across Taiwan with Wang Fa (Wang Shui), the Emperor's eunuch. The trio run into some interesting circumstances, love and nefarious characters on their adventure.

This is one of my nonShaw Brothers films starring one of my top 3 favorites Chi Kuan Chun. I liked this movie because Chi Kuan Chun doesn't play his normal stoic and wise character as he was stereotyped during his Shaw Brothers days. Iron Neck Li allows him to show his range as actor. Li Yung is brave and strong but also shy around women and has a fight now and ask questions later kind of attitude. He is a martial force to be reckoned with as he takes on many enemies throughout their travels.

One of my favorite scenes is where Li picks up a pair of wedding shoes and lucky red envelope of money. The father comes out of the house and greets Li Yung as his son-in-law. Li runs for his life back to where the Emperor and Wang Fa are waiting. The sheer look of terror, which is not a normal look, on Chi Kuan Chun's face made me giggle a little. In this movie, we are able to see many different expressions/emotions from Chi Kuan Chun that we are not used to seeing in his Shaw Brothers films.

The other actors also did a great job in this film, especially Wang Shui as the eunuch, Wang Fa. He provided some funny moments in the movie. Wang seems to get them in a bit of trouble in a brothel and serenades a young lady while she is picking tea. The action wasn't anything spectacular as most of it was hand to hand combat. The sequences are basic and not flashy which fits in with the story of the movie. Don't get me wrong, the action is good but don't expect flipping and many different types of weapons being used. All in all, this is a good film if you are looking to discover a different side of Chi Kuan Chun. I liked everything about the movie except the ending. I wish it had a different ending.

**Iron Ox, The Tiger's Killer (Taiwan, 1974: Tien Han)** - "Blessed" with the revenge template, this made in Taiwan martial arts production looks, feels and is crummy but possesses some interesting narrative touches and quality fighting nonetheless. Wong Goon-Hung is the student out for revenge (and prior out for control of the province) so in his anti-hero ways he seeks out all men potentially responsible. One confrontation has him betting his blood and life so it's asides like this that makes one raise eyebrows. All is a backdrop for excessive fighting though and despite no true variation being evident (i.e. swingy arms and kicking), the length of each fight is welcome as it's totally ferocious and intense. This is fighting, not ballet and having the action for instance take place on a moving cart, on a collapsing roof and amongst farm animals adds excitement to what shouldn't have been approached as a standout. When all bashing is said and done, Iron Ox, The Tiger's Killer is.

**Iron Swallow (Taiwan, 1978: Chang Pei-Cheng) – aka Shaolin Iron Eagle** - Classic old school Kung Fu action with a cast of familiar faces from the 1970's Hong Kong cinema. The Iron Swallow (Judy Lee) is out to get revenge for some crimes that were committed in the past. She's hunting down those who were involved who are now old men. One

of the old men has a son called Tu Lung (Wong Tao) and adaptive one called Ko Fang (Ting Wa Chung). The two son's set out to pursue Judy Lee in order to get justice for what she's done. But not everything is what it appears to be.

I won't go into too much detail regarding the story, because it may spoil it for those who have not watched this film. Iron Swallow is one of those rare Kung Fu movies that has a good story to back up the decent action. The film is far from perfect but it still stands out amongst the many independent films of the era. One of my few gripes is Wong Tao is a little underused and doesn't really come into the film until the last hour. Saying that he does put on the usual great performance and it's a must see for fans of the star.

Ho Ming Hiu did a good job handling the fight choreography and there's some nice acrobatics on display. This is a film that does let the action take a back seat to the story sometimes. Fans expecting a non-stop fight fest should look elsewhere.

There's a mysterious character in the film who wears a hat. I'm sure who the actor is who plays him. He holds his own with the bigger names in the cast. Wong Wing Sang also puts on a good performance as the mysterious fortune teller. Overall an enjoyable film that's worth watching if you are a fan of the cast involved.

**Jackie and Bruce to the Rescue (South Korea, 1982: Ng Ka Chun) – aka Fist of Death;** - F\*\*\* me sideways, the plot was incomprehensible from the word go, but at least it began to come together and make sense as the film advanced. Only just though, there is nothing interesting here. I barely made sense of it all. I was enjoying the fact that the YMCA were responsible for some of the crimes. I think. They might have been framed.

Okay, so the selling point of this film is obviously "Jackie" and "Bruce." They are played exactly as you would expect. Jackie is the comedy buffoon and actually looks a little like the real thing, but the comical scenes he takes part in are just dire. Watching some of these moments made me lose all faith in humanity. No inspired moments, no originality. Bruce is also how you'd expect. The calm and collected ass kicker, wise in his ways and just about likeable. Sorry, Tong Lung looks nothing like Bruce Lee. The rest of the characters are your stock thugs, kingpins and helpless dames, who true to form, get molested at some point in the film.

I wish I could sing this film's praises when it comes to the fight scenes. But that would make me a liar. Maybe they would have been more enjoyable if I'd just listened to them and imagined what was happening. Jackie Chang fights with the expected comedy fist style, using his surroundings as weapons against his opponents, but I promise you, it is by no means interesting. It's completely average fare. I don't mind Tong Lung when he fights, but at the same time, I don't exactly admire him.

It's all a bit bland and dull. I think I paid more attention to the parts in between the fight scenes, like the woman having her titties chomped in the shower. That scene was creepy as hell. I suppose at least there is a lot of this average fighting. Imagine the choreography as plain bread, you don't particularly like it but somebody gives you ten slices so you're full up in the end.

Right, there is a recurring theme here. The soundtrack is also extremely bland, well, except for the odd exciting orchestral number, which is clearly lifted from a real film. Bastards. You have your stock oriental music, your stock suspense music and obviously the QUICK LAUGH NOW comedy numbers to help you time your laughs to perfection.

I have to note though, the English Dub features Jackie delivering the great line, "come on up, try some doggie style." Oh Jackie you loveable rogue. Joking, you suck.

Terrible film to start my reviews with and potentially enough to stop me in my tracks. I hated most of it. Sorry, all of it. I know some people like it and will argue some of the fight scenes are good. But they aren't, not when you stand it side by side with most other kung fu films. Camp fun, if your idea of camp fun is being kicked in the eyeballs for 79 minutes.

**Jade Bow, The (Hong Kong, 1966: Fu Chi, Cheung Sing-Yim)** - There are a few films that are generally credited with being the jump-start to the modern day Wuxia film – The Temple of the Red Lotus, Come Drink with Me (both produced by the Shaw Brothers) and the 1966 film, The Jade Bow. The Jade Bow was produced by The Great Wall –

generally considered a left wing film company that was formed in the 1950's by refugees from the Mainland and whose films alternated between ones with a political or social message and others that were more commercially oriented. The Jade Bow clearly falls into the latter category – a terrifically entertaining story of martial arts chivalry, romance and adventure. Though certainly not made on a large budget, it still has a lush look to it (even with some very fake looking sets), a surprisingly energetic score that has both classically Western and Chinese sections and some very appealing characters. These characters (and of course the actors who play them) make what might seem like a clichéd plot line quite effective.

Of course, what the film is now most famous for is the action and the choreographers who created it. Until this film and the others mentioned above came out in the mid-60's Wuxia films tended to have fairly tame action sequences that were as much Chinese Opera as action choreography. The new style of action that was usually choreographed by true martial artists was more imaginative, faster in nature and contained more graphic violence. Though initially many of the actors in these early films had no real martial arts background, the action was filmed and edited in such a way to enhance their on screen abilities. This was the second film to be choreographed by the team of Lau Kar Leung and Tong Gai (South Dragon, North Phoenix was their first) and they brought a fresh clean style to their action scenes and nicely utilized wires to give the characters great martial arts skills. After this film was released, the Shaw Brothers were so impressed that they persuaded Lau and Tong to join their company and they were to go on to choreograph or direct many of the great martial arts classics of the 60's and 70's.

Even with this reputation though one has to realize that the action will look very quaint by today's standards and even by the standards that Lau and Tong were to soon set in the Chang Che films over the next few years. The three main actors clearly are not martial artists – but were instead popular dramatic actors of the day – and no manner of editing or camera angles can make them seem particularly accomplished. There is also still a lingering operatic feel to the action sequences as the characters often do as much talking as fighting. At least from my perspective what I really enjoyed was the story itself - the theme of revenge across generations, the love triangle that had to end sadly for someone and the poignancy of a father and daughter who are natural enemies but who yearn for the other's love.

The film begins in somewhat confusing fashion as the viewer is introduced to a number of characters over a short period of time – but here goes a quick summary. Shi-yi (Fu Qi, who also co-directed) is told by his dying sifu that Shi-yi needs to rectify a terrible mistake that the sifu made twenty years previously. In a flashback the sifu relates that he once wanted to steal two books on martial arts that would have made him the number 1 hero on the hit parade. While he is looking over the scene, another thief – Meng Sheng-tung (Wong Biu Chan) breaks in and steals one of the books. During the theft though his wife who is carrying their baby daughter is killed – and Meng kills the husband and wife who possessed the book. Meng escapes with the one book – but leaves his daughter behind and a member of the Min Shan family adopts her and brings her up. The dead Li's also had a baby girl and she is brought up by her uncle to hate and someday revenge the death of her parents.

Shi-yi's sifu feels terrible guilt at having done nothing because Meng has now become a feared tyrant and a strong supporter of the Ching Emperor. The book he stole has given him special palm powers such as being able to turn liquids into ice – a very neat party trick in pre-freezer days. So Shi-yi is asked by his sifu to find the Min Shan group and help them in their fight against the Chings. Dressed as a beggar, he soon comes across two cuties who can fight as well as they flirt – the first is Chi-hua (Ping Fan) who is a member of the Min Shan's and of course unknown to her the daughter of the hated Meng. Soon she is to learn who her real father is. The other beauty (Shen-nan – played by Chen Sisi) turns up as a mysterious femme fatale behind a veil who is doing her best to get close to Meng so that she can kill him – she is of course the other daughter. Among her weapons are an array of smoke bombs and a deadly jade bow that shoots poison tipped arrows. The three of them initially form a bond of friendship, but once Shen-nan learns whom Chi-hua really is she is forced by a blood oath and pressure from her now crippled bitter uncle (and no wonder as he has lived in a tree trunk all these years!) to attempt to exact revenge on all members of the Meng family – even on her friend.

**Jade Dragon (Hong Kong, 1968: Kao Li)** - Jiang Qing's father isn't aware that she is in love with his best student Zhao Lei and he marries her to another of his students, played by Tin Ching. Later, she gives birth to a little girl and Tin Ching discovers that she isn't her daughter but Zhao Lei's daughter, who has left the school after his lover married another man. One night, while the baby is crying, he first has the idea to kill her, but when he takes her in his arms, he falls for the little baby and accepts her as his own daughter.

Later, Jiang Qing's father is killed and at the funeral, there is the evil Chu Mu who decides to kidnap Jiang Qing's in order that she becomes his concubine. Sometimes, she succeeds in escaping him and she returns to her house to

see her husband and her daughter, but Chu Mu fights with Tin Ching and the now growing daughter, played by Chen Man Ling. He cripples Tin Ching and leaves with Jiang Qing once again.

As days go on, Chen Man Ling becomes better and better in sword skill, taught by Tin Ching, and one day, she fights with Chu Mu and his men.

In order to avenge her father's honour, she decides to kill Chu Mu, but this one has paid a man to help him to get rid of Tin Ching and his daughter. There's a fight between them and Tin Ching is killed by Chu Mu's men (except the new bodyguard ) and Jiang Qing comes to help her daughter and then, she discovers that this one is fighting with the new bodyguard, who is no one else than her first lover, Chen Man Ling's real father.

As usual, Chu Mu plays an evil man and Chen Man Ling is great. Here is a very good Cathay movie, with a superb story and good fights. Really worth watching. Sorry if there are some little mistakes in my review, I watched this movie a long while ago and forgot some details...

**Jade-Faced Assassin, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Yan Jun)** - I think I read that currently to enter MENSA, the candidate no longer has to have an I.Q. higher than 98% of the population, but instead be able to follow and articulate convoluted martial arts tales such as this. I clearly am not getting into MENSA any time soon. Heck, I never even figured out who the jade faced assassin was. In fact no one had a jade face nor was anyone an assassin as best as I could figure out. And it wasn't until the last two-minutes of the film that I knew if the Lily Ho character was a man or a woman. And just what in tarnation is the Creed that everyone is chasing after. These troubling points of confusion and so much more continue to vex me long after finishing the film. But let's try and sort this out.

A wagon with a man, wife and two infant twins are traveling a lonely road when they are set upon by The Weird Four of Lao Shan. Now if they named themselves that or it was applied by others isn't very clear – but they are in fact a bit odd though soon three of them are dead. They are after the Creed. So are the two sisters of the Chang Cheun Clan who soon show up to kill the Weirds as well as the husband and wife. Considering that the woman is their sister, this is not a very sisterly act, but they think that the husband and wife have taken the Creed with them. As it turns out they haven't. So the elder sister (Essie Lin Chia) comes up with an amazingly devious plan that will take 18-years to play out. They take one child with them and leave the other – knowing that someday they will have to fight to the death not knowing they are siblings and thus the sisters will get their revenge! Wow. That's a plan of all plans. Wouldn't it have been easier just throwing them into a sack and putting it in a river? How do they know that someday they will meet and duel to the death – because this is wuxia, silly!

Soon along comes Hero Lian (Ku Feng) who is the uncle of the dead man and he takes the child with him and goes looking for Chang Zhai who he thinks is responsible for the death of his brother. This takes him to Happy Valley, which is not a rest home but is in fact a home for the most vicious villains in China! Being the nice guys they are they beat up Hero Lian and damage him so badly that they take away his kung fu powers and plan on killing him until the town doctor persuades them to leave the fellow with him so that he can use him as a guinea pig for his healing skills. The child is taken in by the group and taught all of their various martial art powers so that someday the child can help them. So as the years pass they teach Siao Lu-er "Heaven Full of Stars", "Bloody Sand Palm", "Piercing Sword" and of course what education would be complete without "Fairy Sprinkles the Flowers". Unfortunately for themselves they neglected to teach the child badness – and so Siao Lu-er grows up a happy-go-lucky kid who only wants to find the killer of mom and dad and seek revenge on him – every child's dream.

Eighteen years pass and meanwhile Hero Lian is still being healed by the doctor (Yan Jun – director of this film as well) – he must have a hell of a long-term insurance plan! Finally, Siao Lu-er starts her journey to look for Chang Zhai (Chang Pei-shan) and soon spots a young woman being surrounded by some swine – she kills them all but is then immediately surrounded again by the Invincible Heavenly Swordsman who are looking for a treasure map. The woman is asked by them how much she wants for it – her response "Your lives" does not sit well with them and they attack her and get the better of her only to have Siao Lu-er intervene and kill them. The woman (Pan Ying-tzu), gets all dreamy-eyed and develops a crush on Lu-er and is a bit put out when her brother, Hua Yu Chun (Kao Yuen) shows up and tries to kill Lu-er. Why? Because he thinks Lu-er is responsible for the stolen Creed. Clearly one of these two must be the missing sibling – but which one?

Story twist is piled upon story twist until the final duel between Lu-er and Yu Chun – when it is finally revealed that Lu-er is a woman disguised as a man – the sister is properly disappointed – but then oddly so is Yu Chun who has also grown an affection for Lu-er but still feels the need to kill him – it's one of those wuxia things. It's all very messy but rather entertaining – like trying to follow a chess game after a night of heavy drinking. None of the main actors

are martial artists and so that aspect of the film is rather tame with loads of jumps, clanging swords and catching darts in your mouth – all that training comes in handy. Fun and quite silly, but it's nice seeing Lily Ho dominating a martial arts film.

**Jade Fox (Taiwan, 1979: Kao Pao Shu) – aka Ninja vs. Jade Fox** - The movie starts out telling the story of a king that came to power at the age of nine and since he was too young to govern, he had to rely on a corrupt prime minister that was in league with the king's enemy Ya Shen (Lo Lieh). A traitor sends a secret map to Ya Shen's sister Madam Shu Shen (Doris Lung) who is planning to take over the country. Fortunately a general learned of the plot and sent a troop (one man) to the area, who meets up with Madam Shu Shen but she assassinates him. Along the way, our hero Jade Fox (Tien Peng) ends up intercepting the secret map, and so it all begins.

Obviously the whole of the movie is based around this secret map, the Jade Fox and this nasty bitch Madam Shu Shen, but the overview sums it up a little better. Overview: In her bid for domination of the kingdom, a wicked woman invites opponents to their doom at her "Fairyland" estate. Funny thing though, it seems that anyone who is invited has to be beat and kidnapped to get there. Of course, the Madams' biggest chore is to get the Jade Fox, which isn't an easy task.

The movie has a good cast, good fights, good scenery and we also get to see the kid Wong Yat-Lung (that's only found in 9 or so films, like Snuff Bottle Connection) who's name is "Come Again" and his master is a monkey (we get to see him showcase his monkey style).

Overall a movie that's average fare for 1979.

**Jade Tiger, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Chor Yuan)** - Ti Lung's wedding day doesn't quite go as planned with the discovery of his father's headless corpse. The rival Tang clan are chief suspects, renowned for their desire to take control of the martial arts world (yawn...). Ti Lung sets off to take revenge and to retrieve the Jade Tiger of the title; an ornament containing a secret document.

For anyone who's been following Chor Yuan's swordplay films as they've been released by Celestial ('Death Duel', 'Killer Clans', 'Clans of Intrigue') you'll know the format by now. The hero moves from one strange encounter to the next, all the while uncovering plot twists and layers of intrigue and mystery. You never know until the end just who's side everyone is on.

Like the others, it's filmed on those gorgeous Shaw Brothers soundstage sets giving the film a surreal tone. Action is not the main driver of the film, like the others, but is competently handled if not anything to set the film apart.

**Journey of the Doomed (Hong Kong, 1985: Cha Chuen-Yee)** - I have to admit that this 1985 Shaw film wasn't at all what I was expecting. I was hoping for a low grade non-thinking action film with some fun female kung fu fighting. Now the film has a bit of that – certainly the non-thinking part - but it overshadows the limited action with surprisingly big gulps of nudity and sex. In fact, the first thirty minutes of the film seemed like a poor kissing cousin to "Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan" before it went off into a different, rather dull direction. Certainly director Cha Cheun Yee went on later to make a decent girls with guns film, "In the Line of Duty V", but really made his mark later in his two sly takes on triad life, "Once Upon a Time in Triad Society I and II", but very little of this future talent is displayed in his lackluster debut. The worst thing about this is that the film begins with promise – even if not the kind I was expecting – but then makes a terrible decision by focusing on the two dullest characters in the film while allowing the interesting ones to fade away or stay off screen.

The Scent of Women is the hottest bordello in town with oodles of young good looking women, but of course you can never have enough and so the Madam forces one of her young servants to lose her virginity to a customer – but no need to worry – they give her a drug that actually makes her all hot and bothered and ready for action. Shui-erh is also a servant girl/adopted daughter and she doesn't appreciate what has been done to her friend and throws a poisonous snake on the guy. This begins a series of events that leads to general disaster. Needing money for compensation, the Madam goes to the Emperor's next in line for the throne brother (Tony Leung Ka-fai in a very small role) and tells him that Shui-erh is the illegitimate daughter of the Emperor – born to a courtesan many years

before. Shui-erh quickly becomes a political pawn as the brothers want to make use of her – Tony to embarrass his brother and the Emperor for the hungry earthworms.

Tony sends a message to the Three Knights – Max Mok, Candice Yu and Ku Kwan-chung – to find the girl and bring her to him. The Emperor on the other hand recruits Alex Man and his two female killers, Kara Hui Ying Hung and Li Tien-lang (daughter of director Li Han-hsiang) to take care of her permanently before a scandal breaks out. An added complication is that Alex and Candice Yu have feelings for one another and he tries to convince her to look the other way so that he can complete one last high paying job for the both of them. The two assassins go to the bordello but decide that it's a lot easier to just kill everyone than trying to figure out which one is Shui-erh – and thankfully for the male viewers they go during bath time and so most of the women are running around screaming and bleeding in a state of undress. Most are also soon dead except our heroine who escapes and soon runs into a fisherman who helps her out of a jam. He is played by Stephen Tung who was later of course to go on to become one of Hong Kong's best action choreographers – at this time though he seems very skinny and not the stuff of a hero – which may explain of course why he ended up focusing on choreography.

Up to this point the film has been somewhat entertaining in a seedy way, but at this juncture it takes a dreadfully bland detour as Tung and Shui-erh hide out in the woods and set up house – and have sex – and cook and have sex and eat and have sex (hey, there's not a lot else to do in the woods). I noticed that the actress (Fu Yin-yu?) who plays Shui-erh has the Shaw standard tongue out during the sex act trait – sort of like when Michael Jordan used to dribble a basketball - it makes me wonder if this was taught in the Shaw acting classes (“no – a little further out and with a bit of a curl”). All is tranquility in this loving household – so much so that I half expected the music – that is quite awful in its own way by playing a bunch of 70's smaltzy love tunes – would throw in “Our House” from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young:

*Our house, is a very, very, very fine house  
With two cats in the yard  
Life used to be so hard  
Now everything is easy 'cause of you*

Instead of two cats though they have a mute female (Emily Chu in a very early role) and love is all around. Of course sooner or later you know trouble will find them and it does. The film has some action – though not nearly enough – Kara does her thing for a while and then there is a big all over the place kind of fight at the end which was pretty silly, but a well-needed jolt to stay awake by that time. This film was made very near the end of Shaw's days as a film production company before they slid full time into television production - and the film's lack of a well-thought out script and the mediocre film sets reflect this.

**Judgment of An Assassin (Hong Kong, 1977: Sun Chung)** - So 21 members of the Golden Axe clan are murdered by Yu Bao of the Sin Ha clan. The Bai Du clan arrest Yu Bao for the mass murder and aim to bring him to trial (the Grand Hearing) before Madam Fa Si Gu and all of the martial clans. What Sin Ha don't know is Yu Bao is a Bai Du spy... As you can surmise, Bai Du have some very foul plans up their sleeves for the Grand Hearing.

Why are Bai Du doing this and what will Bai Du do to keep other skilled martial artists in the jiang hu from investigating the case?

For the latter question, money can buy almost every skilled martial artist and so Bai Du try to bribe the Golden Whip Man Ying Tai and Swift Sword Hei Mo Li. I won't say what happens with Golden Whip because it's too good a character and subplot point, but Swift Sword, David Chiang's sly tonfa and sword wielding hippie hero, cannot be bought.

And why are Bai Du doing this? Simple. The most evil of martial artists, the cruel and nefarious Bloody Devil, is the Bai Du overlord. He's been waiting for 20 years to get his revenge on his old enemies so why not do so in front of everyone at the Grand Hearing.

The Bloody Devil is unfathomably patient (working on his unscathed skills for 20 years.) That said, BD's patience wears thin once the nosy youngsters Hei Mo Le (David Chiang), Golden Whip (Chung Wa) and Miss Sek (Ching Li) start to make trouble for the power and revenge hungry Bai Du elder.

The film escalates in pace and intensity as we get closer to the Grand hearing and the final fight is pretty insane. This fight hints at the wonderfully OTT choreography Tang Chia would come up with for films like *Shaolin Prince*.



And as crazy as this final fight can get, it still feels relatively grounded because of the fight styles created for each character.

As grounded as Chan Wai Man's performances are in *The Proud Youth* and *The Master Strikes Back*, here as the Bloody Devil, CWM gets to play an all out vicious and remorseless aging martial artist whose every move can result in death. Watching him here is akin to holding one's breath: the character is truly unnerving. He can kill at any moment and his moves here take full advantage of Chan's skills as a kicker and student of various martial arts. CWM's hand moves here (especially against the Golden Whip) look really damn painful. The fights are particularly fast and that adds to the brutal, dangerous feel of the Bloody Devil's skill set. Yeah, he gets some loopy wirework in there too, but this is one CWM character who still freaks me out a bit (and not just because of his spectacularly off kilter looks.) I would never, ever want to face the Bloody Devil in a fight.

As I've said elsewhere, the danger is toned down a little bit when BD first squares off against Swift Sword in the cemetery. This is one of my favorite fights by Tang Chia because you clearly see just how annoyed BD is with Swift Sword and Miss Sek and that annoyance almost leads to their deaths. Tombstone crushing kick still remains a lot of fun and creepy after at least two dozen viewings.

For his opening salvo with Sun Chung, Chan Wai Man is just fantastic here. Ditto for David Chiang. Chiang is as sweet and wily as Chan is intense and creepy. They play off each other quite well (The two men seem like they're having a really good time in this film.)

Ku Feng and Wang Lai are absolutely adorable as Old Hedgehog and Madam Fa. Probably my favorite couple from any of these films because they do act like an old married couple despite never marrying. This is my favorite Ku Feng performance too.

Tang Chia has an interesting mix of fight styles, grounded for the Golden Whip, wuxia playful yet aggressive style for Hei Mo Le, and all out insane and intense for the Bloody Devil.

I absolutely love the set, costume and make up design on this film too. Bloody Devil's cemetery/ruined temple lair is all kinds of Hammer Horror perfect for someone this wicked. The costume designs are fun and BD's make up is utterly nuts. I'd love to know who came up with this character design. I have to wonder about the Bloody Devil wearing monks robes though. Is that a ruse for him to obtain the methods of the unscathed technique from good monks or what?

This is the movie that cemented my admiration for Sun Chung and Chan Wai Man. It's one of my favorite Shaw Brothers films and I never tire of watching it. I know I love a film not only when I love the characters and story, but too, when I can constantly see new things and ask questions about the characters and the filmmakers.

Corruption and lawlessness threaten to overtake the martial world here. Isn't it nice to know those few who refuse to be bought can rise above this?

**Judicial Sword (Taiwan, 1975: Hon Bo-Cheung)** - Pai Ying and Polly Kuan are the leads in this slow moving drama with a few fights. The story was hard to follow because the copy I viewed was chopped on both side to fit VHS format and the old square televisions. The dual Chinese and English subtitles were embedded and consequently they were chopped off too, so along with the poor translations not a lot of sense could be made from the dialog. From what I could get, it involved rebels and bandits. Polly infiltrates a mountain gang on the strength of her martial arts skills by beating their top fighters but the fights were poor in choreography and execution. I'm only rating it a 5 out of 10 and cannot recommend it all. This is not one for the fans just one for a Polly Kuan or Pai Ying completist to watch once.

**Karate Story (Taiwan, 1973: Chang Pei-Cheng) - Hurricane** - The story begins with some soldiers who catch (or kill ?) a man while he is visiting his wife and his little daughter. The wife is raped by the chief of the soldiers in front of the little girl. He loses his medallion and the girl sees that he has a black mole on his left shoulder.

Then, the story jumps 16 years later and we see a troupe of acrobats performing in a street. They are attacked by Mr Ku's men because they haven't asked the permission to perform. They are helped by Mr Chi's son, Xiao Kuan (Charles Heung) and they become friends. Then, we discover that the acrobats are two sisters, Yu Shan and Yu Ping (Wang Ping), who are the daughters of the woman who was raped at the beginning of the movie and the chief of

the acrobats is an old man who saved this woman from committing suicide when she was raped. Xiao Kuan decides to help Yu Ping and the group to perform in order to win some money. Xiao Kuan's father and Mr Ku arrive and Mr Chi slaps his son, but when he sees the medallion which wears Yu Ping, he decides to help the acrobats and give them an empty house which is in his property. Later, he visits Yu Ping's mother and discovers that she is the woman he raped and that Yu Ping is his daughter.

Mr Ku wants all Mr Chi's properties and his right hand Suen Yuet (in another of his villain's role) decides to trap Mr Chi and provoke a feud between him and Mr Ku in killing the chief of the acrobats. Yu Ping decides to avenge her "grandfather" and she goes to Mr Ku's house and kill the ones who killed the old man, helped by Xiao Kuan and Yu Shan, and also by Mr Chi, and the war is declared between Mr Chi and Mr Ku. Yu Ping and Xiao Kuan have fallen in love, but none of their respective parents want to tell them the truth: Mr Chi because he's ashamed by what he done to Yu Ping's mother, and Yu Ping's mother, because she wants him to suffer.

When she discovers that Yu Ping and Xiao Kuan want to marry, Yu Ping's mother refuses but doesn't tell her why, and Yu Ping leaves the house. The mother sends Yu Shan to see Mr Chi and tell him what happened and Xiao Kuan runs to find Yu Ping. When he finds her, they sleep together and when the mother arrives, it's too late and she tells Xiao Kuan to hurry to return at his father's house and ask him the truth. While she was with Mr Chi, Yu Shan helps him to be cured because he has been hurt by a gun and then, she discovers the mole he has on his shoulder and she kills him with a rifle. When Xiao Kuan arrives, he wants to kill her, but before dying, his father tells him that he doesn't want him to kill her and that Yu Ping is his sister.

Yu Ping's mother tells her the truth and Yu Ping commits suicide, and then, her mother too and the poor Yu Shan is left alone, while Xiao Kuan tells Mr Ku that he accepts all his conditions. A very sad movie, but with very good fights from Wang Ping, the actress playing her sister, and Charles Heung, who uses the tiger's style to fight (if I'm not mistaken). Worth to watch.

**Kid From Kwantung, The (Hong Kong, 1982: Tyrone Hsu Hsia)** - Formidable Qing officer Luo Yi Hu seeks out the remnants of the Ming patriots to eliminate any threat of an uprising. Meanwhile, two martial arts schools vie for respectability and the two young sons of the school leaders constantly try to outdo one another. These two ultimately get mixed up with the last remaining pupils of the Qing Lian Clan who have a secret enmity with Luo Yi Hu and prepare for a final showdown with the deadly Manchu killer but Luo is one step ahead of them culminating in a violent finale set inside an old temple.

Fast and furious Shaw Brothers production featuring the awesome Hwang Jang Lee and his devastating array of kicks. One of two completed movies he did for the studio, he was working on a third and for unknown reasons, left the production resulting in the film being shelved. Hwang is easily the best thing about this movie and his wildly exotic kicks get much mileage out the films running time most especially the final 35 minutes. His first appearance is startling showing up 33 minutes in carrying a cat wearing lots of jewelry. He tears into some guys with his lethal kicks while cradling the animal in his arms. His four subordinates take care of the other combatants. This is truly Hwang's showcase and quite possibly his best movie in terms of the variety of kicks on display.

In so many of his movies he only gets to fight once or twice. The good news for Hwang Jang Lee fans is that he gets to fight at least six or more times. The bad news is that like nearly every other film he's been in, the heroes are forced to use ridiculous gimmicks to defeat him. Hwang is so intimidating and such a brutal force onscreen, no one else can compare with him so I guess this was called for as Wong Yu is clearly no match for him nor really anyone else for that matter. His charisma supersedes any other performer I've ever seen him share the screen with and this includes Jackie Chan. Here, the gimmick that brings about Hwang's downfall are burning incense sticks taken from the memorial of the dead heroes killed by Luo throughout the film.

During the first hour, the film follows pretty much any and all of the indie kung fu movie formulas. Numerous interconnecting scenes that have nothing to do with the main plot nor do anything to further said plot. There's even a vampire/corpses herding scene as well as a wholly silly "lion dance" involving Wong Yu dressed up in a chicken suit and his opponents dressed in an elaborate centipede outfit replete with sound effects to match. A similar scene was re-enacted for the Wong Jing-Jet Li flick THE LAST HERO IN CHINA (1993). There's fights sprinkled throughout the first hour but the film itself doesn't come to life until the last 35 minutes where the seriousness finally kicks in resulting in some damn fine pieces of choreography with Hwang dominating most of these.

Wong Yu is impressive in his fight scenes but again, never comes off as if he could be a serious threat to Hwang's character. In fact, it takes four fighters to take him out at the end! Wong was a popular actor at the time but was

never considered famous by Asian moviegoers at least not in the same company as say Gordon Liu, Fu Sheng or Chen Kuan Tai. Hsu Hsia puts Wong to the test here and this is one of his best displays as a hero despite all the comic shenanigans of the film's first hour.

Yang Pan Pan also shows off some of the skills she got to briefly flaunt in LION VS LION (1980). Her kicks are also impressive especially her front-to-reverse back kick.

Kuan Feng, one of my favorites, is also a gifted kicker and practitioner but sadly, he doesn't get to show off too much and his fight with Hwang Jang Lee is fairly quick. In some of Kuan's movies, he often reminds me of HJL, especially in MONKEY KUNG FU (1979), TEN TIGERS OF KWANGTUNG (1978-80) and the otherwise lackluster THE FIGHTING FOOL (1979) and COWARD BASTARD (1980). Kuan could mix it up with the best of them though and it's a shame he didn't get enough meatier roles preferably as a villain.

Yen Shi Kwan gets to show off some skills as well as the heroic master of the Chin Na style, a shaolin style specializing in joint locks and pressure points. Yen is really impressive and I've seen him playing lackeys in past Shaw movies but nothing like his performance here.

Director Hsu Hsia was a bright spot in the Shaw stable and proved himself a capable director and choreographer pulling off some interesting films which may not always be great pieces of cinema, but the fight sequences will most always be the main points of interest. Hsu uses a novel twist during the training sequence towards the end in which the film splits into two frames. The left frame reveals a medium shot of the two practitioners while the right frame details a close up while Chinese characters describe the maneuver onscreen.

I have a book on Chin Na and this style is broken up into Fundamentals and Advanced with many of the strikes designed to disable and even kill but yet these particular strikes take considerable time to master and not the short time span seen in the film.

All in all, a nice indie clone from Shaw Brothers who by this time had ceased being innovators and had begun copying the competition. Most definitely highly recommended for HJL fans, the first hour provides some fights but comedy rules this section of the movie with the main action not coming until the final 35 minutes.

**Kid With The Golden Arm, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Chang Cheh)** - The Venoms return for another fight filled showcase of their impressive martial arts abilities. With probably a higher action to plot ratio than any other of their films, 'Kid' features the kind of high intensity fight scenes we've come to love them for.

Plot may merely be just a device to move between action scenes but it's engaging enough with decent amount of intrigue. Sun Chien, as Yei Yue Man, has been employed to transport a consignment of gold. Dipping a fly into his ointment is the Chi Sar gang; plotting to steal the gold and leaving various traps for the escort party. Lo Meng plays chief baddy for a change, as the kid of the title, and is joined by Lu Feng (no surprise there) and Wang Lung Wei (or there). On the opposing team is Kuo Chui. Wei Pei, Chiang Sheng and Sun Chien.

This really is a 'sit back and enjoy the action' kind of film. Never more than seemingly five minutes from a fight scene, this will almost certainly keep most kung fu fans happy. And the standard of action is extremely high featuring the Venoms' signature timing, speed and agility. Complex sequences of moves are thrown together almost effortlessly and Robert Tai excels himself again with the action choreography. While Kuo Chui and Lo Meng take centre stage in the fighting, each of the leading actors (including Wei Pei and Wang Lung Wei) get ample time to show off their titles.

Great direction from Chang Cheh ensures that the story doesn't feel like an after thought to a collection of fight sequences and production standards remain adequate if not to the higher standards of some of the other Shaw classics.

**Kidnap in Rome (Hong Kong, 1974: Ng See-Yuen)** - A cheapo 1970s attempt at an "international" action film, complete with shaky and gratuitous "travelogue" shots of Rome and electric jazz-orchestra sound track. Untalented Italian/Euro cast, unamusing slapstick humor and a story that makes little sense: bumbling Italians recruit a kung fu fighting waiter from the local Chinese restaurant (!) to rescue a kidnapped toddler. Trapped therein, however, is the

amazing Leung Siu Lung, who proves in his action scenes that he was one of the supreme kickers in film. A still very young Meng Hoi tosses in some acrobatics and nunchaku (yes, the ghost of a certain Bruce Lee haunts this Roman production). If one stretches the imagination, it's possible to see the precursor of "Kiss Of the Dragon" here: a super Chinese guy in "mod" clothing kicking the crap out of Euros.

**Killer, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chor Yuan) - aka Sacred Knives of Vengeance** - As I've watched more of Chor Yuan's work, thanks to the recent Celestial releases, it's become more apparent that his style of filmmaking was far more sophisticated than the average kung fu movie directors. His earlier productions for Shaw Brothers, such as 'The Killer', 'The Lizard' and 'The Bastard', are more in-depth character studies than their titles would suggest. The action is plentiful but as much importance is placed on characterisations; painting an effective backdrop that justifies the violence.

'The Killer' certainly relies on the strength of its character development in keeping the story engaging while injecting action at regular intervals. When the Black Dragon gang's shipment of opium is destroyed by the honourable students of a kung fu school, the gang leader, Chiao Tzu Fei, calls in an old friend to wipe out his enemies. His old friend is the noble, but gullible, martial artist Hsieh Chun, who has no idea of what the gang is really up to and believes that he is righting wrongs.

The film wastes no time in getting stuck into the action as Hsieh Chun pays a visit to the kung fu school and causes mayhem in an explosive beginning which displays that as well as being a well-hard martial artist, Hsieh Chun is also an expert knife thrower. While making his getaway he bumps into former childhood friend, Shiao Mei, who is concerned to learn that Hsieh has a grievance against the kung fu school. Another childhood friend, Ma, turns up having become a customs official and is currently investigating the Black Dragon gang's activities and their connections with Japanese criminals.

Hsieh soon begins to have doubts over whether he is really fighting on the side of justice but finds himself framed for murder and in direct opposition to his old friend Ma. When he finally works out what is happening Hsieh sets out to settle the score with the gangsters and faces both them and their secretive Japanese allies in a typically charged showdown.

The film invests much in the driving themes of lost love, friendship and betrayal turning the action scenes into emotionally charged affairs where Wu Cho Hua's cinematography frames and follows the action perfectly. The film just oozes style from the opening shot with those wonderfully elaborate Shaw Brothers sets.

The action is typical early seventies fare and may not be to everyone's taste (although I love the 'one man vs dozens' fights typical of that era) but is increasingly bloody as the film progresses; as well as fists and feet, there's plenty of knife and 'chopper' action also.

**Killer Army, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Chang Cheh)** - This is considered by many to be one of the Venom Mob's finest overall films and it certainly does feature some awesome fight scenes and good character moments. It is actually kind of similar to *The Magnificent Ruffians*, in that the protagonists are poor, out-of-work kung fu experts; the movie takes quite a while to really get going; it's set in the Republic era; and Lu Feng's villain character requires two helpers to carry his weapon around.

Basically, there's a town controlled by several factions that are loyal to one general. War is ravaging the region, and a lot of refugees are arriving in the town and causing problems. The factions, led by Wang Li, Sun Chien, and Lu Feng, prey on the refugees. Among the unfortunate are Chiang Sheng, Lo Meng, and Philip Kwok. Each of them ends up finding work: Chiang goes to a casino, Lo Meng becomes a kung fu instructor, and Philip Kwok becomes the doorman at a brothel. After a drunken bar fight, all three of them become friends and blood brothers.

There's some intrigue going on between the factions and through a series of events that I didn't quite understand, Philip Kwok ends up framed for the murder of a military ambassador. Kwok and his friends spend the rest of the movie on the lam, trying to get past the various factions while escaping from the city.

Like *The Magnificent Ruffians*, the movie is close to the hour-mark before the plot really begins to kick in. Before that, we spend nearly a third of the film establishing all of the characters and the plight of the refugees in the city. We then spend time with the three protagonists as we see how they become brothers. Then the movie kicks into gear and we get some interesting fight sequences. I'm glad that Chang Cheh cared enough about the characters to

establish their personalities and (sort of) backstories. However, the main conflict ends up becoming more of an excuse for some elaborate fights rather than something really dramatic.

The fights are pretty excellent; some of their most creative choreography is on display here. Lo Meng uses the usual Southern Mantis technique. Philip Kwok uses a bench and a three-section staff. Chiang Sheng fights with a saber and rattan shield. Lu Feng uses a giant spear. Sun Chien uses his trademark kicks, albeit only in one scene. The last two fights really stick out in the movie. In the penultimate set piece, our heroes take on a bunch of men armed with ropes in what appears to be an EXTREME! jump rope match. The choreography is great, although it's rather silly that Chiang Sheng never uses his saber to cut the ropes during the scuffle. The finale features fighters armed with rubber spears, which leads to some interesting choreography.

My main gripe with the Venom Mob films tend to be the tendency of the script to always make Philip Kwok, who's a good actor and great martial artist, the surviving hero in MOST of the films (he has died a few times in these movies). However, watching Lo Meng and Chiang Sheng die as much as they do makes me feel that there was some bias in favor of Kwok.

I also don't appreciate it much that Sun Chien, the kicker of the group, gets the shaft in these movies. He's a talented fighter, but other than *The Kid with the Golden Arm*, these movies give him several fights and only decent choreography, or really good choreography and precious little fight time. The reason may probably be because he was like Tan Tao Liang in that he wasn't much beyond his kicking. I would've liked for the Venom Mob, the talented choreographers they are, to really do for him what the Yuens did for people like John Liu and Hwang Jang Lee. I guess what it all boils down to is that the Venoms were not as good at choreographing kicking as they were at Peking Opera-style acrobatics and weapons.

**Killer Clans (Hong Kong, 1976: Chor Yuan)** - Tsung Hua plays an assassin who is hired by a mysterious man in order to kill Sun Yu Bo (played by Ku Feng). He meets this latter's daughter and they fall for each other.

After a lot of twists, treacheries, mysteries, Tsung Hua finally teams up with Ku Feng in order to discover who is behind the whole plot.

I had enjoyed this movie when I first watched it around 10 years ago, but I was a novice in Chu Yuan's movies and the plot had seemed a little bit difficult to follow for me at that time. When I watched Adam Cheng's series *Meteor, Butterfly, Sword* a little while ago, I enjoyed it a lot, but hadn't seen the link with Killer clans.

It's only when I rewatched Killer clans a few days ago that I recognized the plot of the series, with some differences : in the movies, there are only two assassins : Ling Yun and Tsung Hua and it seems that Ling Yun had also fell for Sun Yu Bo's daughter, while in the series (unless I didn't understand this part), it wasn't due to Sun Yu Bo's daughter that the elder assassin was desperate.

In the series there are four assassins under Kao's orders (the woman who has trained them), and it's the third and fourth ones who help Sun Yu Bo to destroy his enemies.

In the movie, there is no mention at all of another clan, while in the series, Adam Cheng's clan is opposed to Norman Tsui's clan and this latter's daughter falls for the assassin who is played by Tsung Hua in the series before finally falling for the fourth assassin. So, in the movie, no other girl, no other clan, no brother to Sun Yu Bo's daughter, and only two assassins.

Adam Cheng plays Ku Feng's role in the series, while Yueh Hua plays the role of the faithful lieutenant who is the real traitor.

**Killer Constable (Hong Kong, 1980: Kuei Chih-Hung)** – aka **Lightning Kung Fu** - This film is much loved here and the bootleg that I meant to watch is collecting dust (an English dub.) I figured I'd wait to see if Celestial would post digitally in the native language, so here goes nothing. I did not know this was a remake of *The Invincible Fist* (1969) - which I remember I quite enjoyed yet seems lost in my happily hazy blur of mainlining Shaw Brothers films.

That unnecessary info out of the way, it's Chen Kuan Tai taking names, heads and lives. How could I not like that?

Chief Court Constable Leng (CKT) is tasked with the apprehension of the five bandits who stole 200 million gold taels from the Royal treasury. This must be done within 10 days. So Leng selects a group of three additional court police

(including Dick Wei; who will die, because he always dies in SB movies so... ), while two other constables bribe their way into the mission.

Along the way they meet Pai Piao's awesome assassin (this film definitely needed a lot more Pai Piao.) The fight between CKT and PP is, for my currency, the best fight in the film. PP has a lot of tricks up his sleeves and in his sheaths. I was disappointed his role amounted to a cameo, as his character was a lot of fun.

Leng is cold and as sharp as his sword, but the man does have a heart. I'm not spoiling the rest, but with any kind of mystery, I usually don't guess the guilty party off the bat. I did this time and this put a damper on what mystery there is. Otherwise, the story is good and moves along at a good pace, and yes, Chen Kuan Tai is superb as Leng.

What really struck me about this film, the cinematography and certain shots. For the lighting, the deep blues and golds - yellow remind me of Argento's *Suspiria* and the ever flowing streams of red complete the primary color light palette. The deep blue lighting feels like a reflection of how cold and unfeeling Leng must be to commit to his job. I also love seeing rituals and court etiquette stuff (hey Empress Dowager, throw me those fried lobster will you?) There are several amazing visuals in this film, so for that alone I'll eventually revisit this.

*Killer Constable* does feel like a Japanese film and I can see its influence upon *Secret Service of the Imperial Court* (not a bad thing at all...) I didn't find it as depressing or bleak as I expected though. I suppose because a lot of the scenes that were meant to feel bleak or emotional felt forced (the mill scene, Ku Feng and his daughter etc.)

Overall, ***Killer Constable*** was very good and is a must see, but I prefer ***Five Elements Ninjas***, ***Secret Service of the Imperial Court*** and ***The Avenging Eagle***.

**Killer Darts (Hong Kong, 1968: Ho Meng Hua)** - This Shaw Brothers wuxia film from 1968 is a colorful and enjoyable mix of murder, revenge and raging teenage hormones at work. One part of it follows the basic - "I must revenge my parent's death" syndrome - but threaded through this is a teenage love triangle that gives it a very human angle. At times it resembles Archie being pursued by Veronica and Betty - and though these teenagers are extremely deadly with a variety of weapons, like teenagers everywhere they are confused about their own feelings of love and agonize over every perceived slight.

Revenge is in the air. The Evil One kills the wife of swordmaster, Liu Wen Lung, and for a few years Liu wanders the countryside with his disciple, servant and young son, Yu Lung, trying to track him down. In an unexpected twist the disciple, Hu Chi Feng, attempts to rape a woman and ends up stabbing the husband to death and murdering the woman with a killer dart - the secret weapon of his master. Before the woman dies she pleads with her young daughter, Yu Shan, to revenge them - to find and kill the man who uses the killer dart. The girl hides the bloodied dart in her clothes and tearfully pledges to avenge her parents someday. The disciple runs away cursed by his master - and the following day Liu spots the girl walking on the road and takes her in as his own daughter and promises to teach her sword fighting skills. He also decides that it is time to give up the chase and to settle down in a small village and bring up his son and daughter.

Jump ahead ten years and Yu Lung and Yu Shan are now very accomplished martial artists and also very much in love - though neither has the courage to tell the other. Into this picture enters a keen eyed archer - the daughter of a wealthy landowner who sets her sights on Yu Lung. Every time he pays any attention to her, Yu Shan pouts and stomps into the forest where she takes out her anger by chopping down some trees - with her hands! Then she takes out the killer dart and swears revenge once again. Events soon take a serious turn though when a large group of thugs headed by The Green Mountain Bandit threaten the small village and the father, son and daughter decide to protect the villagers. It is soon revealed that behind the bandits are both The Evil One and Hu Chi Feng and a bloodbath of long delayed revenge lies ahead. But before that though, Yu Shan discovers that her master is the creator of the killer dart - and though horrified and broken hearted she mistakenly concludes that she must kill the man who has raised her and the father of the man she loves.

Though told in broad strokes, as the film heads towards its denouement it becomes fairly riveting with loads of action and a fair amount of suspense. Yu Shan drives the narrative - torn apart by mixed feelings of love and hate and a filial duty to her dead parents - she cannot make up her mind what to do - a Hamlet like situation. The action is great fun - not brilliantly choreographed by any means - but fairly imaginative with the utilization of various weapons, a bit of flying, interesting sets (in particular the underground dungeon filled with trap doors and booby traps) and an intensity and purpose to the killing that gives it some emotional impact. There is a certain Western (as in film genre) feel to the film with it taking place in the wide open country, a small town threatened by despicable and colorful villains that chew up the scenery as much as their victims and a few heroes who walk into their lair to settle ten years of payback.

I am afraid I don't know the names of any of these actors though I believe Yu Shan is Chin Ping. If anyone can attach a name to any of the pictures I would be grateful

**Killer From Above (Taiwan, 1977: Joe Law)** - Lo Lieh plays a seemingly ruthless killer who, after murdering some well known benevolent figures, has a price put on his head by nobleman Carter Wong. The reward attracts mercenaries with names like 'Poison Queen' and 'Smiling Killer' (Chang Yi) who give Lo Lieh the run around for the first half of the film until the true facts start to unfold. Of course not everything is as it seems and the plot takes the viewer through a few twists before unveiling the true villain.

The film starts in explosive style as it follows Lo Lieh taking out his enemies one after another. The fight scenes are perfectly executed with Lo Lieh handling the shapes very well and not appearing overshadowed by some of the more competent martial artists among the cast. Of course it was always Lo Lieh's on-screen charisma that made him the star he was and here he dominates every scene. One of the openers, in which he fights four adversaries armed with sickles on chains, is pure class.

Carter Wong gives one of his better fighting performances that allows him to demonstrate skill with a steel whip as well as the traditional kung fu style for which he was best known. I've always felt that his screen appearances can be a little underwhelming when compared against some of his opera trained peers (of course there's no doubt as to his credentials as a true martial artist) but with a good choreographer these shortcomings are usually overcome. The action direction here is not quite on-par with 'Born Invincible' (probably Carter Wong's best film) but is certainly worthwhile.

**Killer Meteors (Hong Kong, 1976: Lo Wei)** - Sometimes if an actor has not had a successful run as a lead then it behooves him or her to take a supporting role. After the box office failings of New Fist of Fury and Shaolin Wooden Men, Lo Wei decided to cast Jackie Chan as a villain in a secondary position to the lead of Jimmy Wang Yu (who starred in many popular pictures as a one-arm martial artist and many not-so-popular films as a two-arm martial artist.) Wang Yu's stardom was slowly fading at the time of this picture, but he had a much more recognizable name than Jackie's. Useless tidbit: according to Jackie, he made 12,000 HK dollars to Wang Yu's 50,000. The Killer Meteors was based on a Gu Long novel and it was the first of two films to be shot in Korea (To Kill with Intrigue was the second.)

Jimmy stars as Mi Wei the Killer Meteor, a sarcastic master of Kung Fu who know no equal. He is so feared and admired that criminals will cut off their fingers in repentance rather than to face his possible wrath and master martial artists serve underneath him. I like Wang Yu's performance with his cocky panache (he even keeps track of his enemies all 491 of them) and glib humor though his character is a bit too "strong" for there to be any real conflict in this film. Also, his weakness at martial arts is very noticeable because of the direction and his slowness (Master of the Flying Guillotine is a good example of where he is choreographed well.) But who needs adroitness of movement when you carry a cool weapon like the Killer Meteor. Only three people have seen this weapon and two of them are dead. Most of the time he uses it as a club on the criminals who are undeserving to die by its true form.

Wei is approached by Qing, the famous Blue-Robed Swordsman who must bring him to the Celestial House of Hua the Hearty (Wa Wu Bin in some translations/dubbings) before July 15 (according to subtitles) or he will die. Mi is intrigued by this, for he is always looking for a challenge worthy of him, and goes with Qing. When he meets Hua (Jackie Chan) he finds a sick man who needs the Killer Meteor's help. Hua was poisoned by his wife in his Ginseng soup (otherwise a normally healthy soup) and she gives him a yearly dose of antidote. Hua does not like this arrangement and wants his wife dead and the antidote all for himself. Wei accepts this challenge though he learns of the four feared bodyguards of his wife: Blazing Star whose weapons are the Plum Blossom Needles (always a favorite of mine, though for weapons so small they always seem to be caught), Killer Hands with fierce suction grip (like GI Joe's Kung Fu grip with vacuum power), Black Lama whose good at black magic and Taoist Ghost (Lee Man Tai) who is good at tricks. Now these characters sound good, but their use in the film is less than desirable.

Unfortunately the plot is weak. There are too many twists and turns that negate previous plot points and characters who are not whom they seem to be. Or are they? My notes on this film is huge but explaining even half of them would be tedious. Generally if plots become overburdened then you can fall back on the martial arts in the film. With Jimmy being the lead character and unless he was being doubled for flips the martial arts are too slow and the action too pedantic. Also there is not a lot of fighting. There are two main fight scenes between Jackie and Jimmy. The first fight scene is the best while the finale is a bit disappointing. It takes place on wooden poles with stakes on the ground – resembling an action scene from Jimmy's earlier film Master of the Flying Guillotine and a bit like Yuen Woo Ping's Iron Monkey, though both are much more interesting. Luckily for the viewers Mi Wei shows off his killer weapon.

The Killer Meteors was a failure at the box office and did not help either Jimmy's or Jackie's career. Along with the confusing story and mediocre action scenes there are too many problems with this film ranging from the overuse of the "lifted" King Kong score to really cheap costumes. Yet, I cannot say I wholly disliked the film. I liked Jimmy's performance, Jackie's "bad guy" performance, some of the story, the beautiful scenery and the titular weapon. Since there is a plethora of better Jimmy Wang Yu and Jackie movies there is no reason to recommend this film unless you are into watching all of Jackie's or Wang Yu's films – like me.

DVD Notes: the two editions of this film I own are the Columbia version and the Simitar Platinum Series version. There is very little difference between the two. Both versions are full-screen (with the credits running letterboxed), both have Mandarin dialogue (though for some reason the Simitar version says Cantonese which is wrong), both have the same dubbed version and both have the same running time (104m). The Columbia version does have English subtitles though.

**Killing Sword (Hong Kong, 1968: Luk Bong)** - Suet Nei plays a young woman who tries to help the villagers who are attacked by the men of the evil Shih Kien. She is helped by Kenneth Tsang, who is the owner of the sword called "Dou Ming Dao" and she leads him to her house. There the martial arts master of her father is jealous and tries to kill Kenneth Tsang but he fails.

He mistreats a young maid of the house and when Kenneth Tsang is trying to help her, he kills her and, as the two men wore the same colour clothes, he accuses Kenneth Tsang for the murder. Kenneth Tsang escapes but he is hurt and he is helped by a young woman (Nancy Sit) who leads him to her house to cure him, and there, he discovers that Nancy Sit's father is nobody else than Shih Kien. This one robs the Dou Ming Dao and, after a lot of twists and fights, it appears that Nancy Sit is Kenneth Tsang's sister and together with Suet Nei, the three of them get rid of Shih Kien and the evil martial arts master who had become one of his men. A very good movie, with an interesting plot and a lot of good fights.

**King Boxer (Taiwan, 1972: Kung Min)- aka King of Boxers** - Evidently, there are four films that go by the name of *King Boxer*. There's the 1973 classic starring Lo Lieh, better known as *Five Fingers of Death*, which kicked off the kung fu craze in the USA. There's another film from the 70s called *Shaolin King Boxer*, which features the kung fu stylings of Lau Kar-Wing (brother of Lau Kar-Leung). There's a movie made around 2000 called *King Boxer*, starring Jackie Chan kicking double Chin Kar-Lok and Billy Chow. And there's this film, which marked the debut of Meng Fei.

Who's Meng Fei, you ask? Meng Fei was a kung fu actor who I guessed was supposed to be one of the big things back in the early 1970s, but ended up being quickly relegated to cheap, Taiwanese films. He's best known for appearing in *The Prodigal Boxer*, one of the first modern portrayals of Chinese folk hero Fong Sai Yuk. He also was one of the titular heroes in Chang Cheh's classic *Five Shaolin Masters*, which made Shaolin kung fu popular during the 1970s. He later went on to appear in mediocre films like *Snake and Crane Secret* and *Kung Fu of Eight Drunkards*. Meng Fei had something of a boyish look to him that could've been honed into a good Jackie Chan or Alexander Fu Sheng type of actor, but I guess it never quite worked out that way. He could fight, no doubt about it. However, Hong Kong cinema is a fickle place, and skill and boyish good looks are not always enough to succeed over there.

The plot of the film is pretty easy to follow. Chow, the King Boxer (Meng Fei) is off in Thailand visiting a female friend. We don't know what their background together is, although it's obvious that they like each other. Chow asks the girl to take him to see a muay thai match and she does, introducing him to her brother, who's one of the fighters. Before the match, the brother is approached by some Thai thugs who try to bribe him to throw the match. He refuses and ends up knocking his opponent out. Later on, they are attacked by the same thugs and while the Thai boxing brother handles most of them, he needs Chow's help to beat the leader. Chow offers to teach his special kung fu to the brother.

Meanwhile, back in China, a Japanese karate master (Yasuaki Kurata, *Fist of Legend* and *Call Me Dragon*) hears stories of the "King Boxer" and desires to challenge him. He goes to Chow's school, but Chow is still in Thailand. The Japanese master and his lackeys beat up the Chinese students and break their signboard, which is a grave insult in kung fu cinema. The Japanese master is also smitten with Chow's sister, and invites her to dinner some time later. Yup, beating up her friends and gravely insulting her brother's school is the quickest way to a girl's heart.

Chow returns just in time to stop his sister from giving in and challenging the Japanese fighter to a fight. He whoops the Japanese master, who slinks away to plan his revenge. That revenge does come, in the form of a sneaky ambush at a reconciliatory dinner at a brothel/tea house which leads to a big fight and Chow's ultimate death. Shortly



thereafter, Chow's friends from Thailand show up and the Thai boxing brother vows to take revenge.

First and foremost, this is a dull film. In a way that most of you will be able to relate to, the first ten minutes of the film is dedicated to travelogue shots of Thailand including...\*gulp\*...six minutes of footage of ELEPHANTS!!! Heck, most of the non-kung fu segments set in Thailand are travelogue footage of temples and stuff. The movie moves dreadfully slow between fight scenes in such a way that, despite there being seven fights taking up a little less than a third of a film, it feels like the fights are few and far between.

The other major flaw of the film is that it simply reminds you of other, better films. The segments with the Japanese school are reminiscent of Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury*. The scenes and Thailand will make you think of *The Big Boss* and *Duel of Fists* more than anything else. Meng Fei's final fight in the restaurant looks like it was inspired by Chang Cheh's *Vengeance!*. What's really strange about all this is that the film feels like it's set in two different time periods: Thailand circa 1970 and Shanghai circa 1920 (which is when *Fist of Fury* was set).

The fights aren't bad, although some of them suffer from early 1970s choreography: glorified arm-flailing. Meng Fei's fights are the best, notably his fight with Yasuaki Kurata. The last fight, while full of energy, is a bit sloppy on the technique side. There's a muay thai match early on that is kind of dull, made more so by the fact that the camera stays about a 50 feet away from the combatants for a good part of the fight. There is some traditional kung fu to be seen in some of the fights, but nothing really special.

Yeah, this film is really only for completists like me. I do plan on watching more early 1970s kung fu films, despite the fact that I think a lot of them will be like this one: clunky, crude, silly, and ultimately boring. Nonetheless, I do hope that I'll find some real gems if I look hard enough.

**King Eagle (Hong Kong, 1971: Chang Cheh)** - Dying member of clan passes information about internal troubles for Ti Lung who just want to mind his own business but evil ones refuse to take his word...Eventually things change, as he says "they are now MY business"...Uncomplicated and good storyline, enough action and some red paint made this very entertaining re-re-visit. Several years since last view and had partly forgotten how great this is, and in my opinion bit overlooked when people list their favorites by him at Shaws. Although competition is tough because of several other quality movies...

**King of Fists and Dollars, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Cheng Hong Yip, Chan Ming Wa) – aka Challenge of the Shaolin Disciples** - Danny Lee is a rich guy who exploits a mine, but when there is an accident, he doesn't want to pay any medical fees and he reduces the pay of his villagers workers, so, they seek help of an old master, who fights with the best fighter of Danny Lee (Tsai Hung) and defeats him. Danny Lee is so angry that he travels in China and when he returns home, he brings with him the best fighter in China, Chan Wai Man. He then plots to destroy the old master and Chan Wai Man hurts him and he dies a few days later, after having told his daughter (Chang Ling ) to pass his kung fu of king of fist to his pupil David Chiang. As Chan Wai Man wants half of Danny Lee's possessions, this latter agrees with the condition that CWM kills all his opponents, and later, CWM is almost killed by Chang Ling, David Chiang and the last disciple of the old master, and CWM then understands that Danny Lee has plotted in order to make the three of them to get rid of him. He is killed by Danny Lee's men and then, it's a fierce combat that opposes Danny Lee and the three friends. Very good and inventive fights, with good training scenes, and a little bit of comedy. Worth watching.

**Kings of Blade and Sword (Taiwan, 1970: Li Kuang-Tsang)** - In order to get rid of some bandits who are taking advantage of the villagers, Ting Chiang and Lee Shu join their forces. They are helped by a strange monk, played by Chiang Ming. Ting Chiang and Chiang Ming have a quarrel but when the bandits attack, they still join forces.

Later, a fake Chiang Ming kills some villagers and Lee Shu and Ting Chiang want to kill Chiang Ming. Then, Chiang Ming and Ting Chiang discover that they have the same medallion and they are related (that's the same old story : as there are no subtitles, it's difficult to know the real link that exists between the two men...) and finally, the three of them are able to get rid of the bandits.

That's a good movie, with really good fights.

### **Knife of Devil's Roaring and Souls Missing, The (Taiwan, 1976: Li Kuang-Tsang) - Aka Return of the Leg Fighter -**

The movie is structured much like a murder mystery, albeit one that gives the viewer a fight scene every couple of minutes. There's a murderer who goes by the moniker Devil Swordsman gallivanting around the countryside in an outfit that looks like a ninja cloak by way of a KKK robe who's killing all of the major kung fu masters and clan leaders with a single swipe to the face. One of his first victims is the head of the White Dragon tribe, whose son, Shan, is played by Dorian Tan Tao-Liang. Shan naturally assumes the role of detective in order to avenge his father, since that's what people do in these movies.

Our first suspect is a mysterious stranger (Tung Li) whom Shan finds at the tomb belonging to the Maple Leaf tribe. The stranger flees after a brief skirmish, leaving Shan to deal with the daughter and *de facto* leader of the Maple Leaf clan, played by Doris Lung Jun-Her (her name is Yulian in the film). Their fight ends once she finds out who Shan is, and she promptly invites to partake of her household's hospitality. It's from her uncle that Shan learns that the Devil Swordsman had been responsible for a campaign of terror about twenty years earlier, but had been defeated by the combined efforts of the various tribe leaders and disappeared. One would surmise that the Devil Swordsman is simply seeking revenge for his defeat years before.

Story time is interrupted by the appearance of another clan, led by kung fu veteran Lo Lih. This particular gang likes to fight with flaming meteor hammers, although Lo fights with his hands and the *shuangdao*, when Yulian and Shan show up to calm things down. It turns out that someone was framing the Maple Leaf clan for the murderer's naughty deeds, although Lo Lih is quickly set straight. Shan ends up refusing Yulian's hospitality and goes back to the inn, where the Devil Swordsman is waiting for him. Thanks to Shan's supreme kicking skills, Shan lives to tell the tale, which he does, to Yulian and her uncle.

While journeying through the forest, Shan receives a mysterious note informing him that a haunted monastery in the valley holds the answer to his questions. A Taoist monk of sorts informs that the head priest of the monastery is away on business and that Shan would do well to track down said priest. Said monk is shown to doing some mercenary work for the Devil Swordsman, although he gets his face sliced open like the others once he starts asking for more money. Has there ever been a movie in which a character has asked for more money for helping the villain and he/she actually got paid, instead of getting killed? Or is that one of those B-movie cliché laws? You know, one of those Things-You-Should-Never-Do-In-a-Movie-That-Characters-Do-Anyway...whatever.

Shan finds the priest, who has been violently murdered. Before he can touch the poison needle that did the job, the mysterious stranger from the tomb, Flying Swallow, shows up stops him. So I guess we can exclude Flying Swallow from the list of possible suspects at this point. After an interlude introducing the Fantastic Pickpocket, another auxiliary character, Shan has a second showdown with the Devil Swordsman in a forest, effectively setting up the Pickpocket as a suspect and excluding Flying Swallow as one, since the latter joins the fray and helps scare off the masked marauder.

Later, Shan receives a note informing him that the author of the poison needle has relocated himself to the local brothel. Shan goes there to investigate and the brothel madam throws herself at him, prompting him to respond with the film's best line: "B\*\*\*\*! You cheap b\*\*\*\*!" (Sorry, it just sounds funny coming out Tan Tao-Liang's mouth) The madam's prostitutes capture Shan, but he's rescued by Yulian and the Madam is forced to show them the hideout of the Poison Scholar, the fighter known for using poison needles against his opponents. The Poison Scholar denies killing the monk, at which moment the Madam kills him with his own needles, but not before getting killed herself. Shan is now back to square one, now that his only leads are now dead.

Following the death of Miao (Lo Lih's character), Yulian's uncle informs Shan that the only way to defeat the Devil Swordsman is with the Sunshine Sword, which is in the possession of the Abbot Hai Tin of the Shaolin Temple. Shan goes to the Temple and beats a lot of people up before the Abbot agrees to teach him how to use the sword. Finally, with the Sunshine Sword in hand, Shan is ready to face the Martial World's common enemy. Enter a plethora of plot twists, new characters, changing alliances, and revelations.

In the tradition of Chinese *wuxia* films, this film is overloaded with colorful characters, exotic weapons and a plot that might easily lose novice viewers who don't play close attention to the proceedings. The mystery element to the story makes the film a whole lot more fun than it might have been had the identity of the killer been revealed from the outset. Some of the third act twists also add to the entertainment value, even if the final reveal is a bit of a cheat. One may also complain that the Poison Scholar subplot never really goes anywhere, but it was still fun to watch.

Dorian Tan is one of the least-likely actors to be chosen to play a *wuxia* hero, since his skills were always limited to his kicking. Thankfully, his trademark legwork gets a lot of attention here and fans of hardcore bootage shouldn't be too disappointed. Tan also gets to perform some staff fighting and swordplay, at which he does a respectable, if not memorable, job. It's also novel to see him playing a younger character, as opposed to the older, more stoic heroes in his other 70s films. He is undermined a little by the dubbing, which gives him the voice of the sarcastic young

sorcerer/con-man in the English dub of *Ninja in the Dragon's Den*. It doesn't clash so much with the character as it does with Tan Tao-Liang himself.

Backing him up is the always-dependable Doris Lung, who shows off some strong eagle claw techniques before switching to the Emei Piercers during the finale. This is the third movie I'm aware of that features that particular weapon, the other two being Tan Tao Liang's *Dynasty* and *Secret Rivals II*. Basically, the Emei Piercer is a metal rod that's pointed at both ends. In the middle is a ring that fits around the middle finger. The piercer spins around the ring and can be used to confuse the opponent before attacking. It's one of those weapons that never...cough...strikes you as being practical, but it makes for a fun movie weapon.

Lo Lieh is on hand to bust out the *shuangdao*, or double broadswords. The two-edged straight sword, meteor hammer, and broadsword figure heavily into the action in this movie. I can't think of many movies where the final fight begins with the villain trying to run over the heroes with a flying sedan. Most of the actors acquit themselves well to the fighting and I never found myself complaining about Chan San-Yat's action direction. He certainly does a better job here than he did with the early Jackie Chan wuxia films *Killer Meteors* and *To Kill With Intrigue* and he gets more out of Tan Tao-Liang than a number of other action directors did later in Tan's career. It's really a must for old school fans, when you get right down to it.

**Knight Errant (Hong Kong, 1973: Ting Shan-His) – aka Dragon Fist** - Ha. It's ironic that I just finished writing a review for *Shaolin Challenges Ninja*, which also stars Yasuaki Kurata. This film is pretty much the polar opposite of that film. Where *Shaolin Challenges Ninja* is smart, compassionate, and beautifully shot and choreographed, this move is dumb, hateful, and cheap. But is that a bad thing?

Well, you can't always have art, and when Jimmy Wang Yu is involved, you can almost never have art, especially if it was made during the 1970s. No one hates the Japanese like Jimmy, and in this film, he once again gets to kill some of them.

He plays a guy named Shaolin. Shaolin's dad was killed by the Japanese. Years later, Shaolin seeks revenge against the sons of the men who killed his father. Shaolin wears shitty 1970s flares, and everyone really digs plaid. The only person who doesn't wear clashing plaids is this little old Yoda looking woman. She's the evil matron of the Japanese thugs. Towering under her opponents at about four feet tall, she reminded me of that annoying lady from *Poltergeist*, only this one can kick ass. In fact, if there had been a scene in which the little kungfu lady beat the shit out of the little psychic lady, I'd probably like this movie more.

She does get to lie underneath the tire of a car and laugh maniacally as Jimmy Wang Yu peels out on her. Yes, that's your hero, folks. He backs over a little old midget and then tries to peel out on her stomach. Ouch! Lucky for her she has super duper karate training, meaning during the whole thing she can just shake her fists and laugh as Jimmy looks on in confused amazement.

Even though she's evil and all, it's pretty hard to get behind a hero that just tries to run old ladies over with his taxi. I mean, he could at least fight her. If she kicks his ass (which she does), he probably doesn't deserve to be a hero. But I guess in Jimmy's special world, heroes can do rotten things and we are supposed to cheer them.

To his credit, that scene was pretty cool. Unfortunately, it's the best thing in the film. The rest of it is pretty typical Jimmy Wang Yu fare. He swings his arms at people. They swing them back. It's elevated a notch by the inclusion of a talented martial arts star like Yasuaki Kurata, but he's the villain, as usual, and even he can't pull a four-star fight out of someone like Jimmy Wang Yu. So they mostly just swing their arms around and run to and fro in some shipping yard.

Knight Errants is better than many Jimmy Wang Yu films that came after he made the rather unsuccessful transition from sword hero (where he was good) to kungfu hero (where he sucked orangutan ass). But that's sort of like saying it's better than getting your knees pounded with a ballpeen hammer. I didn't hate this movie the way I hated films like *Bloody Struggle*, but it sure isn't an example of how good a kungfu film can be. You can do worse than Knight Errants, but anything worse will probably also star Jimmy Wang Yu.

**Knockabout (Hong Kong, 1979: Sammo Hung)** - A late 1970s ground breaking and nearly perfect kung fu comedy and masterpiece that marked a zenith not only in martial arts cinema, but also in the movie fighting careers of every member of this super cast in which everyone shows high skills, speed, creativity and precision. They are so good here, that the martial arts seems effortless and fun, and seamlessly woven into the comedy. In his first starring role, a young Yuen Biao is in his absolute prime, with tae kwon do-style kicks (best kicking he has ever done), monkey style, choy lay fut, and various other southern Chinese animal styles. Leung Kar Yan is an amusing foil (a good role) and uses a rolling fist hybrid style that is meant to be comedic. Lau Kar Wing (brother of Lau Kar Leung) puts on a

tremendous technically-correct fighting clinic (watch for hung gar and wing chun based moves). To top off, Sammo adds to the finale with wing chun and monkey. Easily one of the top five martial arts films ever made.

**Kung Fu Arts (Taiwan, 1978: Chung Ching-Woon)** - This has to be one of the worst old school Martial Arts flicks I've sat through. Despite the cast including Carter Wong & Chan Sing there's little going for this film. Carter Wong plays King Chi, who has been set up to take the blame for the murder of his future father in law. He escape's punishment and goes into hiding to plot his revenge. The synopsis included in the Mill Creek 50-moive box set makes the film sound better than it actually is. This film had the potential to be good but low budget doesn't even describe this independent movie.

"Princess, am I the father of this boy, or is the monkey?"

The film gave me the impression it had been edited down from a longer run time perhaps?. King Chi's Kung Fu training consists of one single scene. There's little in the way of Kung Fu action. What we do get isn't all that impressive. The films two stars have looked far better in other productions. Even the most die hard of Chan Sing fans will find this hard to get through. If I knew the original title I could have searched for it on the HKMDB.

Before I finish my rant I have to mention the real star of the film. A monkey that's listed in the credits as been some well known french circus act. Due to the inclusion of the ape we get some truly random moments & dialogue. For some odd reason that's never explained King Chi's love interest has to marry a monkey in his absence.

I thought Tiger Love was one of the worst old school films until watching *Kung Fu Arts* today. One film for Carter Wong/Chan Sing completist's only. Anyone else should stay well clear of this movie.

**Kung Fu Brothers in the Wild West (Hong Kong/Italy, 1973: Yang Man-Yi )**- Cheaply made kung fu/western. Not nearly as good as Shanghai Joe, and I'm not a big fan of Shanghai Joe. The kung fu fights are pretty good. The final fight between Pai Paio and Kao Kang has it's moments, but it goes on for about 10 minutes too long. And that's the problem with this movie. When a flaw occurs, it turns into a disaster. I'm glad I saw it, but there's nothing to recommend. The only positive thing I can think of is that it's not quite as bad as the John Liu kung fu/western *Dragon Blood*.

**Kung Fu Emperor - (Taiwan, 1980: Pao Hsueh-Li) - aka Ninja The Kung Fu Emperor** - This lavish production sees Ti Lung, quite late on in his kung fu movie career, playing a prince, Yung Chung, whose life is threatened by his own brother. The argument is over who is next in line to the throne and the emperor is seriously ill. Yung Chung outwardly gives the appearance of a scholar but secretly has been learning kung fu.

To escape danger Yung Chung leaves the royal court and tries to blend in with the common people. Of course he's not too successful and his slightly arrogant nature brings him into trouble with town guards who, after a fantastic battle in a restaurant, throw him into jail. Only when Yung Chung produces his royal seal is he freed but of course his whereabouts then become known and he soon has to evade capture from his brother's men.

While in the outside world he gets help from a couple of street performers, one memorably played by Tan Tao Liang, and a beggar he meets in the town jail. When the emperor finally dies Yung Chung, with his entourage, heads back to the royal court and makes his claim for the thrown.

I've only seen a few of Ti Lung's martial arts films and those that I have seen, such as 'Blood Brothers', 'New One Armed Swordsman' and 'Shanghai 13', didn't really require him to do anything special (although those are all excellent films). It surprised me therefore to see just how well Ti Lung could move. I was expecting to see obvious body doubles for the more intricate sequences but no, he displayed far greater athletic ability than I had previously gave him credit for.

Tan Tao Liang is also a welcome addition to the cast but is rather sidelined. He does still get chance to show off his amazing kicks but centre stage is definitely reserved for Ti Lung.

The choreography throughout the film is very good and is complemented by extravagant sets and costumes. The plot mixes intrigue and conspiracy to good effect and is certainly engaging enough for a kung fu film. While probably not a classic movie, its still worth checking out.

**Kung Fu from Beyond the Grave (Hong Kong, 1982: Lee Chiu)** - A voice-over in the beginning informs us that the 7<sup>th</sup> month is the month in which the spirits of the dead are allowed to rise from their graves and roam free for a limited period of time. It is during one of said months that a young kung fu fighter (Billy Chong) is visited by the ghost of his dad, who tells him to head over to a village and avenge his death and find his body so that he can have a proper burial. Chong's mother warns him that his uncles used to send men over to the place to investigate tales of the supernatural, but none of them ever returned. Arriving in the village, we discover that the town bad guy (Lo Lieh) has employed a black magic sorcerer (assistant action director Addy Sung) to perform a series of rites on him so that he can become invincible, thus protecting him from people with vendettas...on both sides of the grave. Chong teams up with a government agent (Alan Chui, who doubled as the film's action director), a dead body collector, and a ghost wrangler working at the local temple and seeks to bring Lo Lieh and the sorcerer to justice.

For the most part, this is a more conventional (and more technically polished) follow-up to **Kung Fu Zombie**. Gone is the bizarre supernatural humor, effed-up family dynamics, undercranked (yet brutal) fight action, strong graphic violence and all-around weirdness. Alan Chui's action is a lot more grounded and mannered than Dang Tak-Cheung's proto-90s wire-fu, but it certainly entertaining in its own right. Billy Chow gets to show off his kicking skills in a more acrobatic way, although his handwork remains as basic as it was in the other movies I've seen from him. While the presence of Kwan Yung-Moon is missed, the penultimate fight, a 3-on-1 between Chong, Chui, Addy Sung and another guy is both elaborate and brutal, plus it ends with a great line: "Three against one? I didn't expect to come out alive." There are lots of ghosts, flying objects and bloody rituals, and the latter involves cutting the hearts (offscreen) of couples who are in the middle of coitus. There's a brief bit of full frontal female nudity on display here, for those who like that sort of thing (and unlike two of the other movies I saw this month that had that on display, it's in a "consensual context"). The most famous sequence comes about midway through when Chong and some ghostly friends try to kill the sorcerer, who responds by summoning Dracula himself. It's certainly goofy, but thankfully was placed in the middle and not at the climax. I found it more entertaining on the whole than **Kung Fu Zombie**, but I may be in the minority here.

**Kung Fu Genius (Hong Kong, 1979: Wilson Tong)** - Enter Cliff Lok, The self proclaimed kung fu genius who is constantly creating techniques and studying different manuals to create newer styles. He has a stooge/friend who is also his student who comes up with the idea to open up a kwoon (school) called (yeah you guessed it) The Genius School of Kung fu. Upon coronation some bully boys cause trouble hassling them because the school is in their district and they think the school's presence is gonna disrupt their cash flow. Cliff Lok sorts out them while fending off their knife attacks with pieces of Chinese characters from the school's signboard and sends them scurrying off while spectators look on with awe. Word soon spreads about the school's credibility.

Another Kung-fu School not far off from the Genius School called The Spiritual boxing Gym which specializes in summoning spirits to possess the host for combat hear of the new school. The sifu, Peter Chan Lung (*Daggers 8*) merely states that all schools are like brothers and should all coexist peacefully. Two of his students think otherwise and decide to cut down the competition albeit secretly from their sifu's knowledge.

A showdown ensues with Cliff Lok facing off against Hsiao Hou (*Mad Monkey Kung Fu*) and from there the fights within the movie continue to escalate with other screen familiars present like Lee Hoi San (magnificent butcher) and The movie's director and choreographer Wilson Tong "The Foot Doctor" Wai Shing (*The Victim*) It should be noted that this was the first movie where Wilson Tong was the Director and Chief choreographer. The result is nothing short of impressive. Tong shows his extensive skills with flair and alacrity alongside Cliff Lok who was one of Yuen Jim Yuen's students and a real life practitioner of martial arts such as Choi Lay Fut and Karate.

Hsiao Hou, Peter Chan Lung, and Lee Hoi San were all classmates in Madame Fan Fok Fa's school of Peking opera (Yuen Jim Yuen's top rival) and they represented as expected. Look for Peter Chan's "Duck fist kung fu" where he gets a rare moment to strut his stuff instead of being a henchman getting slapped around like he normally does in movies. Hsiao Hou does his trademark Monkey style and some other tricks as well. Lee Hoi San always the heel, plays as the owner of a brothel who has a vendetta against our resident genius and the spiritual gym.

In a nutshell, this is one of those movies that serves up Kung fu piping hot so whet your palettes and prepare to feast. "The Foot Doctor" proves that he can dance with the best of them and play chef in the kitchen while preparing choice Kung fu!

**Kung Fu Girl (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Wei) aka None But the Brave** - Cheng Pei-pei in her first film for Golden Harvest after her contract with Shaw Brothers and after her marriage in 1970, in which she moved to the United States, she stars as Chen Xiaoying a martial artist who gets involved with revolutionaries in the early Chinese Republic. You can date this film to 1915 since it deals with Yuan Shikai and the Twenty-One Demands which pretty much ended Yuan's political career (he would die the following year.) Chen is involved in a plot to pretend to be the little sister of Lei Tianbao (Ou Wei) a senior captain in Beijing's Apprehension Division to help free another revolutionary Mr. Cai currently in prison. The current administration is considered toadies to the Japanese led by Mr. Sano (Jô Shishido) and they must be stopped. She goes with her "aunt" Xu Feng who happens to be a martial artist and from the School of Fists and Fury -- I hope this is the correct translation as it is too cool. She must fool her "brother" and help the cause. Will she triumph?

Lo Wei has a habit of reusing material to the point of redundancy. One can argue that an auteur will revisit themes, reusing them, manipulating them like with the "wrong man" scenario of Hitchcock or Wong Kar-wai's fascination with unrequited love. But there is a fine line and it can be easy to delve into laziness. Lo Wei had a hit in *Fist of Fury*, so he revisited that movie's themes a couple of times including this and *New Fist of Fury* with Jackie Chan. This was not new with him though as you can see several similar "spy" pictures he did with the Shaw Brothers like *The Golden Buddha* and *Summons to Death* which are almost remakes of each other. I wonder how many times he played a cigar chomping bad guy in his movies. There are many similarities in this film beyond the Japanese antagonists in the Republic era to *Fist of Fury* which is a topic that had already been done Ad Nauseum that past few years (*Hapkido*, *Lady Whirlwind*, *The Bloody Fists*). You have a protagonist that is very strong. You literally copy a famous scene twice using the same music cues where Bruce Lee famously was shown in slow motion with trails of his arms showing though Cheng Pei-pei is using her legs. You have an ending that combines several elements of the previous movie. I bet a back-to-back rewatch of the two could unearth more similarities.

There are also a plethora of plot problems some I cannot divulge without spoilers. One of the funniest I have seen in many films is when characters look aside to each other as to show the audience they know something the other characters are not aware of -- which we already know so it is redundant. Well when you are a spy and you do that in front of your enemies you look even more like an idiot and risk blowing the mission.

Surprisingly this film has one aspect better than *Fist of Fury*. You have a legitimate antagonist in Ou Wei, who unfortunately died way too young that year of kidney failure, whose acting ability allow sympathy for what could have been a stock bad guy character. I was quite impressed with his performance and Lo Wei allowing him to show nuance where often this type of character is one-dimensional at best. Just compare his performance to Lo Wei.

The cinematography from Chan Ching-Kui is surprisingly good at times. There are some exquisite shots using deep focus, composition of the whole frame and movement that is better than most Golden Harvest movies. The set-design which seems to also have a higher budget than most Golden Harvest films really helps out the look. Now only if the pacing of the film was better as it moves at a languid pace without really affecting the plot, mood or anything else. When I saw Jô Shishido, who was famous for not only his cheek implants but several films with director Seijun Suzuki (my favorite is *Youth of the Beast*), I was hoping more of him than what was shown.

When trying to figure out the success and/or failure of the action scenes one has to look at the combination of the actors, director and action director(s). Some action directors are left to their own devices and sometimes the director can be the biggest influence. So often we are left speculating on who has the biggest impact on the fight scene. Han-Ying-chieh\* (he plays an "assassin" in the film) had a long and distinguished career as an action choreographer. He was a mentor to many including Sammo Hung, who in my opinion, would outshine him soon in this area. Han's Peking Opera background (Fu Lian Cheng which was established 1904 and closed in 1948) is obvious (Chang Cheh decided on not using him in the 1960s instead going with Tong Gai and Lau Kar-leung\*\*) and his set-up of fight scenes did not always take advantage of cinematic techniques. He tends to block action with a somewhat proscenium approach that reminds me of how Charles Chaplin (whom most of the Japanese are wearing his type of mustache) would film a scene for most of his career. Sometimes it is hard to take the "stage" out of the Peking Opera performers. Now this approach works fine with Cheng Pei-pei who can string combinations of kicks together though others like Ou Wei and even James Tien do not fare as well. There is an exception in the final fight scene with Jô Shishido which is a bit more inventive and uses object, doors and a variety of moves (it is also one of the few fights that is not a squash, aka a fight where Cheng is not completely dominate.) Even though the film is mostly grounded in realism there are several superman jumps where an individual has super jumping power (done by running the camera backward), which Han has a lot in his work over the years. Han was also known for using trampolines\*\*\* in his choreography, he is credited for being one of the first for doing so in film, which he uses minimally here. He also incorporates a decent amount of Judo (mostly wrist locks that result in throws because

anyone can use these as long as the opponent can flip over) and some Karate. The action is solid but not spectacular and unfortunately not enough to offset the mediocre script.

I think fans of Cheng Pei-pei will like this more than most as she is one of the high points. It is a decent film but plods on at a slow pace without adding anything that fans of Hong Kong cinema have not seen before. While there is some good camera work, a solid performance from both Cheng and Ou, the Japanese are stereotyped and this really is nowhere near as important (though no less racial) or as exciting as *Fist of Fury*. Now fans of Jackie Chan who want to finish his filmography will also have to see this. He has a decent small role as a Japanese who does not like his soup too cold. But check out that table he is on. It has him and fellow Peking Opera brothers (known as the Seven Little Fortunes) Yuen Wah and Corey Yuen. That table would soon be outshining everyone else in this film in the Hong Kong industry.

**Kung Fu Girls (Taiwan, 1978: Chen Chun-Liang) - aka The Three And Half Dumb Kung Fu Girls** - The release I have is the French Bach Films release under the title *Le Masque infernal contre la panthère du kung-fu* (*The infernal mask vs the kung fu panther*) though the title you get when you watch the film is *Le Masque infernal contre les tigresses du kung fu* (*The infernal mask vs the kung fu tigresses*), which is much more fitting as you don't have one, but 4 fighters (one of the English title says "Three And Half" not because one of these girls is crippled, but because these girls are a very young kid and 3 young adults - 2 pairs of sisters whose parents argue to become the head of some village).

The movie itself is a pure riot:

- The French dub is horrendously funny: seems like they couldn't get 4 actual women/girls to voice the main characters - 2 girls have the same voice and the little girl sounds a bit weird (more like an adult trying to sound like a little girl).

- The soundtrack is so ridiculous I won't be able to keep a straight face hearing Rossini's *William Tell Overture* anymore (cause this, a silly music that fits the tone of the film and a piece that must have been stolen from an anime are the only music you'll hear throughout the film).

- The choreography is very nice (the little girl has some nice moves, but what was the point of showing all these animal styles early in the film if they aren't using them at all - guess you still get to see).

- The comedy has everything: the girls' argue like brats, there's a Scoobydoo-like chase scene, a cross-dressing that kind of backfires (remember, ladies: NEVER dress up as a guy to sneak into a brothel - heck, who would come up with such a stupid idea), some racist stuff (one henchman is a magician and when he fights the 4 main characters, he turns into an arab and uses his flute to lift the girls' dresses, flies on a magic carpet and breathes fire before becoming a blind Japanese man... All with cliché Arab or Japanese music, of course).. There's stuff for everyone, even silly sound effects such as a siren when the breathing-fire guy runs around after getting burnt.

Basically, my verdict is that this is something so bad that it's great - and strangely enough, with all the stuff that is wrong in this film, I couldn't spot any single flaw.

**Kung Fu Instructor, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Sun Chung)** - This is a movie I wanted to like more than I did. The story is solid; a village is torn between a rivalry of two clans, which has gotten to the point where a literal line divides the clans' territory, and if one person crosses the line, he gets a limb cut off as punishment. The evil Meng clan, led by Ku Feng, hires a kung fu teacher, Wang Yang (Ti Lung) to train his men. When Wang Yang prevents his new pupils from maiming a member of the Zhou clan (Wang Yue), he finds himself on the wrong side of the conflict. The direction and photography are fine. I had a problem with the action direction. From a technical standpoint, the choreography and techniques on display are impeccable. This really should be one of the quintessential pole-fighting movies, right up there with **8 Diagram Pole Fighter** and **Shaolin Invincible Sticks**, and to many, I'm sure it is. But the fighting felt a notch too slow and staged to me, almost like Tong Gai was more interested in giving a clinic on pole/staff technique applications than doing a real fight. The Lau Family were Always able to do that sort of thing without sacrificing speed and intensity. Here it felt a little forced to me. But yeah, mileage will definitely vary on this one.

**Kung Fu Kid, The (1977: Lo Wei)** - Alright, this is my first try to write something like a review of a movie or some kind of introduction to something that might encourage people to waste money on it and put it on their shelves next to the other hundreds and thousands of movies. I'm honest, I'm just getting into Martial Arts/Kung Fu movies and I'm absolutely not knowledgeable in this part of cinema history so no fancy background facts or associations with other Kung Fu movies, just my thoughts that I somehow scrapped together after I watched that particular movie. Who knows, maybe if I find it enjoyable to write about movies and you're thinking that my review was somewhat bearable than..maybe there'll be some more reviews in the future.

Enough blabla lets get to the movie:

The Kung Fu Kid from 1977 directed by Lo Wei. I don't know Lo Wei but [hkmdb](#) says that he directed a lot of movies and was an actor in even more movies so I'm sure that I'll see him again in my cinematic journey.

The movie starts with a woman who screams, according to the subtitles, which are by the way somewhere between "Ah I get it, I can follow the story" and "Oh my god please, why are they using first graders to translate a movie", "Thief! Thief!" ah yeah we're in the middle of a robbery. Of course the woman who gets robbed is totally dizzy after screaming straight into the camera and spinning together with the cameraman for a few seconds, so there is no way she could catch that thief. The thief is not some random HongKong-punk no he's our star of the movie: Fang Min played by Michael Chan Wai-Man, again I don't know who that actor is but [hkmdb](#) says that he likes to play in countless movies so, see you soon Michael!

Fang Min gets away and looks into the bag. What did he get? Some delicious Hong Kong Dollars, uh yeah. Next scene he buys some drugs, I don't know what kind of drugs, as I'm too lazy to look up the exact scene but it is probably some pretty dangerous stuff. I heard that the father is an important figure in an asian family, the center of everything. Fang Min didn't buy the drugs for himself but for his father, good son. But hey. whats that? His father is dead, oh no, the addiction was too much for him. As if this is not enough, the police raids the house and arrest Fang Min he doesn't even has time to bury his father.

Now Fang Min is in the prison and after some decent fighting scenes he realize that fighting is no good in the prison so he becomes the model prisoner, everybody loves him and after all he is happy being in the prison, far away from that tough Hong Kong. That was the movie...

No not really. Some policeman, with the goal of crushing the local drug scene needs some guy who'll infiltrate one of the biggest smuggling group, the group around our main villain: Big Man. The director of the prison recommends Fang Min because he has decent Kung Fu skills and he is super nice, Fang Min accepts as he sees this as an opportunity to revenge his fathers death and be of some use for the society.

There are more characters in the movie and some nice twists in the story but I think that should be enough for you to get an idea of what the movie is all about.

The fighting scenes are quite nice and the stuff between the fighting isn't that bad either, totally worth some Dollars if you find the VCD by Fortune Star which is currently unavailable at [DDDhouse](#). You probably know other shops or ways to get the movie. The VCD itself is ok, don't expect too much, the picture quality is bearable and the subtitles, well, I have seen worse.

**Kung Fu Kids Break Away (Taiwan, 1980: Kan Ping Yu)** - Four years before The Karate Kid came the Kung Fu Kids. Their stature (and budget) may be small, but their hearts are mighty and they have fighting skills of extraordinary magnitude. I found this little gem while looking for something a little off the beaten track for March-ial Arts month, and was expecting dire comedy, overly cute kids (preferably orphans), inept bad guys and a hot teenage girl to inflame the nascent lust slowly building in the older kid's testicles. I got all these, but so much more.

The film, it has to be said, it fairly crude (a fact which the slightly wobbly VHS rip I watched enhanced), but the two kids are bearable and the stunt work is, at times, outstanding. I've watched my fair share of cheapo martial arts films -the video guy I used to get my tapes from in the mid-1980s had a Suzuki van full of everything from hardcore porn (my first introduction to the strange world of John Holmes) to pirate copies of the Star Wars films – so a good



sub-Bruce Lee film was always welcome. Acrobatics, deafening foley effects, a touch of unconvincing blood and hopeless dubbing were Saturday night heaven. The films all blended into one in my head – did I watch *The Jade Claw*, *The Five Deadly Venoms* or *The Kid With the Golden Arm* last night? Who knows – the films were usually on blank tapes, with no subtitles half the time, but as long as they were full of action, who cared?

*Kung Fu Kids Break Away* would have been rejected after the first few minutes. Who wants young lads doing backflips when we can have ninjas and shaolin monks taking each other on, with a variety of nasty-looking hardware. My fifteen year-old self was hungry for violence, but now, I can appreciate the subtle side of things a little more (only a little, mind), and can enjoy something like *Kung Fu Kids* even though it's light on extreme violence. That's not to say that the film doesn't have it's nasty side – the slapstick skits (which are no less annoying than early Jackie Chan, I suppose) sit uneasily alongside a few stronger scenes. Fans of Asian cinema will recognise at least two of the faces here: the villain, Mr. Chu is played by Eddie Ko, who has starred in films as varied as *Johnnie To & Ka Fai-Wai's Mad Detective*, *Stanley Tong's Rumble in the Bronx* (alongside Jackie Chan) and *Lethal Weapon 4*. The putative star and hero, Eagle, is played by Casanova Wong. As well as having perhaps the coolest name in cinema, the Korean has appeared in chop socky classics like *The Game of Death* and *Warriors 2*. This film is neither of the two's finest hour, but it's still a fun little thing. The two kids (Wang Ye Leung – who plays Sanmao, a famous Chinese comic character I've never heard of – and Au Dai) are far less irritating than they could be and Wang is a phenomenal, acrobatic performer, who's subsequent career didn't do him justice at all (*Sleeping Fist?* *Snuff Bottle Connection?*).

All in all, *Kung Fu Kids Break Away* is a fairly light, but entertaining bit of fluff. Fans of Wong and Ko will love it (although Wong doesn't feature much at all, despite what the publicity says).

**Kung Fu Master Named Drunk Cat (Hong Kong, 1978: Cheung Sum)** - Obscure kung fu film set in the modern day, but whose choreography is grounded in traditional kung fu sensibilities (re: all shapes). John Cheung accidentally receives a jar of candies containing smuggled Diamonds from a woman (Candace Yu) and is chased by villain Thompson Kao (who sports a hideous putty cyst on his neck--turns out to be a plot point). Helping him to stay alive is his friend, Sharon Yeung Pan Pan and her teacher, Simon Yuen Siu-Tin. There are quite a bit of fights: Sharon does her usual mix of kicks and acrobatics, with a smattering of snake. Simon Yuen is given two chances to show that he can still fight and bust a move or two. John Cheung does the usual Peking Opera thing: acrobatics mixed with some Southern styles. Nothing really innovative here, but it's still fun. Choreography by Liu Hok Ming (*Blind Fist of Bruce*) and Lam Moon Wa (*Story of the Drunken Master*). Despite the title, there is no drunken boxing.

**Kung Fu of 8 Drunkards (Taiwan, 1980: Wu Ma)** - The movie doesn't waste much time and as soon as the opening credits are done, we meet our hero, Chang Fung (Meng Fei, *Young Hero from Shaolin* and *The Unbeatable 28*), who's practicing drunken boxing. The training exercise consists of him holding a couple of large jars of wine while he stands in the horse posture with some shards from broken jars threatening to pierce his bum if he can't remain in stance. Chang's master (Lui Ming, *How Wong Fei-Hung Pitted Seven Lions Against the Golden Dragon*) has already passed out by this point. Chang is tired of these tortuous exercises and decides to leave, despite his recently-awakened master's attempts to torture him into staying.

Chang Fung goes back to the restaurant his uncle (Goo Chang, *The Eight Escorts* and *The Shaolin Heroes*) owns, where he works as a waiter. His uncle isn't very pleased that his nephew has spent the last month learning kung fu. They never are.

A few days later, Chang Fung is out buying eggs for the restaurant when he happens upon a martial arts tournament. The current champion is a huge fellow (Cheng Fu-Hung, who showed up in Meng Fei's *The Guy with Secret Kung Fu*). Due to the mischievous efforts of a local beggar named Monkey (Wu Ma, *Righting Wrongs* and *House of Fury*), Chang Fung finds himself on the platform with Mr. Giant, whom he beats down with a wicker basket.

Chang Fung's skills come to the attention of the rich fellow running the tournament (Ma Cheung, *Ninja Swords of Death*) who challenges him to a fight. Chang is about to get beaten down when Monkey helps him off the platform and the two run away. Chang's would-be opponent, Ta Pei, comments to some random Panther style fighter that Chang's skills greatly resemble those of a man named Wu Sing. Panther guy goes to the home of a rich man named Pai (Chen Sing, *Revenge of the Kung fu Dragon* and *Shaolin Plot*) and tells him that Wu Sing may just have resurfaced. Mr. Pai does not seem very happy about that.

The rest of the movie alternates between comic scenes of Chang Fung and Monkey doing nothing that is even

remotely funny, and the members of Pai's gang trying to kill Chang Fung. We eventually learn that Pai and the other bad guys were robbers of some sort and Wu Sing, Chang's master, was a martial artist who stepped in to stop them during a hold-up. He wasn't able to successfully repel them, but they figured he died from his wounds anyway, so he was able to go into hiding. Figuring out that he didn't have much left to do with his life, Wu Sing decided to take on a student and teach him the "Eight Immortals" style before he went to that big kegger in the sky. Chang Fung will now have to renew his training in order to defeat Pai and his men.

I'd say about 2/3 of the blame for this movie not working goes to actor/director Wu Ma. Wu Ma has shown himself to be a pretty solid director when he wants to be. I liked *Shaolin Deadly Kicks* well enough, and *The Dead and the Deadly* wasn't bad. I've heard some good things about *Showdown at Cotton Mill* and *Kick Boxer* as well. But he directs this movie as if he's seen *The Drunken Master*, but completely failed to understand why it worked. It certainly doesn't help that too much of the film's running time is spent with Wu Ma's Monkey character getting involved in comic situations that aren't even that funny to begin with. Really, they could've written Monkey out of the script, dedicated more time to the other characters, and they would've had a tighter, better film.

Unfortunately, that isn't the case. It's hard to feel any sympathy for Wu Sing after hearing his sob story because he's only had a few minutes of screen time until then. The teacher-student dynamic is one of the most important aspects of these films, so ditching it in favor of a relationship between the hero and an idiot does the film no favors whatsoever. The same can be applied to Pai Yu (Sze-Ma Yu-Chiao, who looks like Miki Saegusa from *Heisei Godzilla* films, if Miki were an expert in the snake style), Mr. Pai's daughter and Chang Fung's love interest. She has something of a pivotal role in both the climax and the bittersweet denouement, but she gets so little screen time that to believe that Chang actually liked her is just asking too much of the viewer. Heck, the movie doesn't even give us much of a reason that she's in love with Chang in the first place.

Wu's meandering direction also undercuts the main villains. In addition to Mr. Pai, there are two hired killers called Silver Tiger and Gold Tiger, both of whom are supposed to be powerful and imposing, but in reality, don't do much of anything. It doesn't take much of a kung fu fighter to beat up a sick old man. And when they meet their ends at the hands of Chang Fung, who almost doesn't break a sweat, one has to wonder why they were even included in the film in the first place. Mr. Pai is pretty underwhelming as the villain, since like most of the other characters, he's given very little to do until his fight with Chang. In fact, his character does almost nothing throughout the entire movie that it's hard to root for Chang, since he's practically just fighting some random guy. As it stands, *Kung Fu of 8 Drunkards* is a collection of subplots as half baked as a clumsily-made clay wine pot.

Of course, Chan Muk-Chuen's static fight choreography doesn't help. As I've already said, had this sort of action been found in a Chang Cheh film circa 1974, it'd be just fine. But Sammo Hung, Lau Kar-Leung, Jackie Chan, the Venom Mob, and others had pushed the envelope for fight choreography so far by this point that Chan's slow, metronomic fight direction just won't cut the mustard. There is more action here than in *Story of the Drunken Master*, to be sure, but at least Lam Moon-Wah's choreography was quick and fluid. Muk-Chuen tries to throw in a couple of played-for-laugh fights, but screws the pooch on that, too. They mainly look like two uncoordinated people goofing off, unlike those in *Drunken Master*, which were choreographed just as meticulously as the more serious duels were.

I'm not a Meng Fei fan in any way, but I do respect the man. He was, after all, not only the first modern Fong Sai-Yuk, but also one of the original *Five Shaolin Masters*. He carved out a solid career for himself early on when people like Jackie Chan were still eking out a living as stuntmen and action directors. In some ways, he has the sort of impish personality that makes him something of a proto-Jackie Chan. That makes it all the more ironic that he didn't come close to matching Jackie's charisma in this film. To make things worse, his drunken boxing is the stiffest, least-acrobatic *jui kuen* I've seen so far. There's no element of randomness to the attacks, no staggering, and no displays of physical prowess that Jackie Chan exhibited in his classic film. It looks like Generic Southern System-Derived Movie Fighting #342 with some bent wrists and cup-holding gestures just for that drunk boxing "flavor."

The result of that is that the interesting action belongs to co-stars Lung Fei and Henry Luk. Lung Fei plays a killer who walks around in a straw hat and cocks his head to the side as a character quirk. His character uses the Northern Eagle Claw, which is always welcome in movies. Too many films have the characters using the Southern Eagle Claw, which uses three fingers and not all of them, passing it off as the Northern style. Luk plays the Panther style master. The Panther style shows up very little in movies, so to see it onscreen without being "diluted" with other animal styles is a treat in itself.

Unless you're some rabid fan of drunken fist boxing or Meng Fei and feel the burning desire to watching anything that features one of those two elements, you're better off watching some other movie. It's not terrible, but it's pretty forgettable and ultimately not worth the effort to watch.

**Kung Fu Vs. Yoga (Hong Kong, 1979: Chan Chuan)** - This must certainly be a candidate for one of the most unusual kung fu movies ever made, featuring the skills of a yoga master/contortionist whose martial arts techniques bring tears to the eyes just watching.

That all doesn't come in until the end though and the main part of the story isn't about yoga at all. Chin Yiet Sang, interestingly in a role that doesn't require him to be made up as an old man ( a la 'Buddha Assassinator' or 'Thundering Mantis') goes to the other end of the scale and plays a young kid who decides to leave home and live with his uncle in the city. He is joined by his friend, and kung fu rival, Alan Hsu and the pair set to work in the uncle's crockery shop (which allows for a couple of comedic fight opportunities).

The humorous situations that the pair find themselves in keep the story interesting but with little focus. The two leads are so entertaining though that the meandering nature of the plot doesn't detract. Matters do become more confused at about the halfway mark where Chin Yiet Sang wins a kung fu competition and the hand in marriage of the daughter of a wealthy businessman. However the daughter is less than enthused and refuses to consummate the marriage until her husband brings her 3 specific gifts. Each of these involve a kung fu challenge but the most interesting is the task to obtain a ruby belonging to Dao Bashir; an Indian herbalist.

It really seems that the scriptwriters had a great idea in showcasing the skills of the contortionist but had no real idea how to make a complete film out of it. Still, the martial arts ability of the two lead actors is superbly displayed throughout and the fights are full of variety with interesting adversaries who each have their own original style. An early encounter with a blind master is particularly inventive but none compare to the yoga master who can dislocate his joints at will (makes me cringe just thinking of it) to throw punches and kicks at impossible angles. Needless to say that the two 'heroes' have to resort to trickery to defeat Dao Bashir, who I have to say, I sympathised with entirely as he is quite the innocent victim in this.

For the first hour or so, 'Kung Fu Vs Yoga' (I think that's a retile) is a competently made kung fu comedy with a steady stream of well executed action, interesting characters and unpredictable plot (almost as if they made it up as they went along). All of these points make it worth seeing but the last 20 minutes turns the film into an absolute 'must-see' with the most unusual kung fu fights ever. I defy anyone not to cringe in horror when watching this.

**Kung Fu Zombie (Hong Kong, 1981: Hua Shan)** - Although I grew up on a steady diet of kungfu, Ultraman, and Godzilla (among other things) throughout most of my life, it wasn't until the late 1980s that I threw on a dapper looking fedora and headed out in search of material beyond that which was served up to me on Saturday afternoon via various themed "theaters" on television. It was a difficult road to travel at the time. These days, you can go pretty much anywhere and find a slew of cheap kungfu films for sale. But not so long ago, getting even the lamest fare from across the Pacific required months of searching and dealing with shady tape traders who kept asking about rape and bondage videos when all you wanted was a copy of the latest Jackie Chan film.

When I moved down to Florida, I met a guy named Pat who shared my love for all things kungfu, both old and new. It was he who took me to what was, at the time, the holy grail of kungfu movie stores, a place on the outskirts of Gainesville that stocked shelves upon shelves of old school kungfu films, not to mention weird horror and black action films. It was one of those moments where your eyes fill with tears, and you simply want to fall to your knees and mutter "Amitabha!" as you gaze upon the glory. A couple years later, I would meet a girl (coincidentally named Patty) who worked at this same store. I'd like to think that she was impressed by the ferocity with which I devoured their entire stock of kungfu films that first brought us together, but I can't be entirely certain. Ours would be a wild and fun romance culminating in a disastrous move to Charlotte, North Carolina, which in turn lead to my moving to New York to chase fortune and glory. Truly great is the power of kungfu.

In those first few carefree years in Florida, back before another particularly stormy relationship crushed much of my spirit for the bulk of a couple years, few things could bring a glow to my face quite like the nights Pat, myself, our friend Todd, and assorted others would gather around my massive 10-inch television, pop in the latest rental from the video store, and smile as we heard those familiar notes accompanying an animated seahorse flying through space while an announcer shouted "THIS is an Ocean Shores VIDEO presentation!"

Ahh, yes my brothers and sisters, those were, as we say in the old country, the good ol' days. I had a tiny apartment with a worthless air conditioner, good friends, a video store full of dollar rental kungfu films, and a crush on the girl at the counter. That entire period in my life was overflowing with good friends and plenty of fun. We'd stay up til the wee small hours, packed ten in a small room, laughing, drinking, eating, and watching kungfu films. It's hard to separate this film from the circumstances under which I first watched Kungfu Zombie, but that doesn't matter since any way you slice it, this is damn good filmmaking.

Kungfu Zombie was among our favorite rentals, along with War on Shaolin Temple, Young Taoism Fighter, and Jackie Chan's Police Story. Whenever it was our turn to entertain the troops, one of those movies would invariably find its way into the VCR, even if it had to chase away the copy of Black Devil Doll From Hell everyone wanted to see as well. Tons of top-notch kungfu action, comedy, ghosts and goblins, and pretty much everything in the world that

I would want to see thrown together in one film is launched at me from the madness that is Kungfu Zombie. The only thing that could possibly make it better would have been if it was in 3D.

Not that it's a flawless film by any stretch of the imagination. The writing leaves a considerable amount to be desired, and none of the characters are very likable people. You certainly wouldn't want any of them for friends, except perhaps the wizard who can resurrect you if you need such services. At the same time, it's not like people are renting a movie called Kungfu Zombie in hopes of seeing rapier-sharp wit and clever writing. More than likely, they are renting such a movie in hopes of watching some living kungfu people fighting some non-living kungfu people, and the movie certainly delivers that in spades. In a way, the movie is perfect despite its flaws, perhaps even because of them.

The under-rated, should-have-been superstar, Billy Chong, stars as a snotty, rebellious kungfu student who constantly fights with his ailing dad. Well, he pretty much just constantly fights, period, and runs really fast. But those are things you can do when you learn kungfu. He's pretty much a jerk, which is something kungfu comedies love to do. They make the hero a total asshole. Sometimes, in the end, he has learned a valuable lesson about the value of humility and respect. More times than not, however, he would beat people up then fart, and that would be the end of the movie. While Billy doesn't do much farting in this, he does get to remain a jerk through the whole movie. Character-wise, there isn't much about the guy for which you can root. But he does kick a lot of ass, and he looks great doing it, so that makes him the hero.

A gang of cut-throats have taken a disliking to the lad and his sidekick, who is named Hamster (he would be good friends with Young Rudy from Wolf Devil Woman). They employ the services of a black magic priest to resurrect some corpses to fight Chong. Granted, it seems a rather complex plan. Employ a priest to resurrect zombies that will, once given the cue, fly through the air and push Chong into a pit filled with spikes. A spike-filled pit seems a rather conventional culmination for a plan that involves resurrecting the dead, but then I'm not really a martial arts bandit, so I guess it's not my place to question their machinations.

When your plan is so intricate that it requires a large number of flow charts, Venn diagrams, and a priest who can summon the dead, things are bound to go awry. What the bad guys didn't figure on is that after making a rather impressive flying leap from a coffin, a moldy, crumbling corpse is a rather ineffective fighter. Chong dispatches them without much difficulty, not to mention the fact that he's rather unimpressed by the fact that he's being attacked by the living dead. I've watched a lot of zombie films, and a lot of things involving corpses, and despite the fact that I consider myself more or less desensitized to their appearance in movies, I'd probably still be taken aback a tad by the appearance of one in real life, especially if it was flying through the air and trying to punch me. For Chong, however, a gang of zombies is no different than any other gang.

The evil leader guy, who sports a pair of rather sloppy muttonchop burns, accidentally gets pushed into the pit of spikes during the ensuing melee, being justly undone by his own treachery. Satisfied that the night of being attacked by creatures of the night returned from the grave for bloody revenge has ended, Chong heads off for the local tavern to make merry.

Things don't go as well for the wizard, who is soon plagued by Muttonchop's ghost demanding resurrection services. Complications arise due to the fact that Muttonchop's body is badly mutilated after taking the tumble into the spike-filled pit. Let that be a lesson to you. If you are a treacherous villain bent on killing someone who tends to walk through the woods at night, don't employ a wizard to raise the dead in an attempt to push your mark into a spike-filled grave. Instead, just hide behind a bush and shoot him with an arrow or something as he saunters by. It's a lot less complicated, and you have a much slimmer chance of you yourself falling into the spikes. Just because you can summon the dead doesn't mean every plot you hatch has to involve the summoning of the dead.

While Billy Chong may not be an ugly ghost adorned with mangy muttonchops, his life still isn't perfect, either. His family—which consists only of his father and the mysterious Hamster—is dysfunctional, and when a family is dysfunctional in a kungfu film that means all they do is yell and try to kick each other. Just about every interaction between Billy and his dad consists of the following exchange:

Father: "Ungrateful bastard!"

Billy: "Go to hell, old man!"

Which is then followed up by a few minutes of fighting that culminates in the father nearly dying of heart failure, muttering "You're killing me, you ungrateful son of a bitch!" which elicits a smirk from Billy, who will wave bye-bye

and go out on the town with Hamster. As one may guess, there isn't a whole lot to like about either Billy or his father. They're both assholes. Even when the father isn't scolding Billy, he still talks to him in an angry, condescending manner. Billy responds by goading his father into having another heart attack, which is the source of much hilarity around their household. The mother probably died just to get some peace and quiet.

The father soon reveals to Billy that he has been yelling at him so much because they come from a family of constables, and even as they speak, a blood enemy of the family is coming to seek revenge. It doesn't matter if he kills the father or Billy, so long as he kills someone. Billy sees this as little more than his father using his own son as protection against a bad guy, and the father pretty much responds with, "Yeah, so what? And you're a no-good little bastard, too." Then I think they fight, the dad has a heart attack, and Billy goes out gambling with Hamster.

Meanwhile, Muttonchops is busy haunting the priest, and in his spare time, feeling up sexy ladies. Hey, if you were invisible, don't pretend like you wouldn't at least be tempted to cop a cheap feel off the local harlot. The priest eventually agrees, as the nightmarish haunting takes the form of things like the ghost pulling the priest's seat out from under him, constantly moving his wine out of reach, and other dastardly spooktacular shenanigans. Down at the local morgue, they find the freshly dead body of a powerful kungfu fighter who is obviously evil on account of his long hair and black cape. When the gang leader tries to inhabit the corpse of the super-baddie, they discover that the guy is, in fact, not quite dead. I guess he just likes sleeping in a coffin down at the local morgue. Awakened from his slumber, the villain makes a beeline toward Billy's home to extract a little revenge.

The two fight for hours, and Hamster whiles away the time by constantly dumping buckets of water on Billy for no real reason other than it makes Billy's muscle glisten a bit more. It's all the reason you need, I guess. I know if I had muscles in place of the puny sticks occupying the position of arms on my body, I'd always have a guy named Hamster around to dump water on me. I'd also probably do that thing where when someone asks you the time, you check your watch and flex your bicep at the same time. Then I'd go down to the beach and kick sand in my former self's face.

Chong is eventually victorious, killing the bad guy and collecting a sizable reward, which his father promptly takes for himself. Why does Billy even live with this guy? You know, filial piety only needs to go so far. The wizard-priest and Muttonchops figure they can try to use the bad guy's body again for another resurrection attempt. Since they only get three tries before Muttonchops is condemned to roam the earth as an incorporeal spirit, 'Chops inspires confidence in the wizard by using the old encouragement tactic of slapping the wizard in the head and yelling, "You better get it right this time, you stupid bastard!" The wizard, who commands all the vast powers of darkness, takes this abuse for some reason. I guess he and Billy are kindred spirits in a way, despite being on opposite sides of the law. But since the film isn't really interested in this as a plot device as much as it is interested in scenes of guys engaged in Moe-Larry type relationships, let's just drop the whole thing.

They mess up again, discovering this time that the bad guy is simply too evil to be killed by normal means such as breaking his neck. The failed possession attempt also transforms the baddie into a super-invincible mega-bad zombie. He's not one of those slow Night of the Living Dead zombies either. He hauls ass and has invincible kungfu. We Westerners think that when the zombies come (and they will come), they will be slow and rotten and easy to kill simply by shooting them in the head or hitting them with a pipe. We're not ready for the eventuality that they might all be a bunch of buff, invincible masters of the martial arts.

The zombie guy immediately sets out to kill Billy Chong. And meanwhile, the bumbling gang guy half-possesses Billy's dad, resulting in some weird behavior as the two fight for control of the body. Eventually, Chong has to face off against his possessed dad and the super invincible zombie guy. Luckily, a monk shows up out of nowhere to lend him some advice and holy relics just before the zombie's hands burst into fists of flame! Things just get wilder from there on out.

On the surface of things, this is a pretty straightforward movie. When you dig a level deeper, however, what you discover is that there isn't a deeper level, and you should have stayed up on the surface level instead of ruining the floor by digging around. But not every movie has to be a deep reflection on the dark heart of man. Sometimes, a movie can just be about a loudmouth braggart kicking a zombie's ass, and that's the road Kungfu Zombie chooses for itself. The writing has just enough effort put into it to propel it from one supernatural fight scene to the next, and that's all it really needs.

The fight scenes come fast and furious, and though some undercranking is obvious in spots, it doesn't detract from the overall quality of the kungfu. Billy Chong is a superb looking fighter, carrying himself with a lethal combination of grace, speed, and power. It's a wonder he didn't become a bigger star than he did, but from what I hear, he's

quite the attraction these days down on Malaysian television. You can't complain about steady work, I guess. I'd certainly trade in my job to be a big star on Malaysian television.

The final fight between Chong and his supernatural-powered nemesis is one of the top old-school fights out there, and while it doesn't come close to the pure frenetic genius of the Sammo Hung/Yuen Biao fight scenes contained in films like *Prodigal Son*, *Magnificent Butcher*, or Sammo's own supernatural kungfu farce *Encounter of the Spooky Kind*, it's still great stuff. The fights before that are all short but sweet as well, and while I would have preferred a few more minutes of kungfu in place of more malicious comedy, there's really no good reason to complain about a film with this much action in it.

The comedy is hit or miss, and while it misses more than it hits, it doesn't miss in a way that would turn you off to the film. I'm guessing the relationship between Billy and his dad is played mostly for laughs, but after a while, it's not funny so much as it is like one of those times when you were a little kid over at a friend's house while the friends was getting yelled at by his parents. You just sort of sit there sheepishly and awkward, trying to pretend you don't notice your friend is getting spanked right in front of you. Looking back, at least you can be thankful that your friend and their parents were not kungfu aces who settled all their arguments by yelling "Bastard!" and proceeding to kungfu the crap out of one another for the next five minutes.

On the plus side of the comedy is the guy who plays the wizard. He's superb as the not-entirely-evil priest who can't seem to catch a break, especially when he has to walk around town wearing a giant leaf hat in order to avoid the angry ghost whose resurrection he botched three times. A combination of wonderful facial expressions and perfect timing make him the standout performer in the film even up against Chong's impressive kungfu skill. The rest of the cast performs dutifully but without anything really spectacular to make them memorable. Muttonchops is just there to bellow and make the "angry surprised" face a lot. His accomplices fulfill the standard old school kungfu roles of "goofy fat guy" and "goofy skinny guy." If you are wondering about the inclusion of the giant fake wart with the single piece of super-thick hair coming out of it, don't worry. Hong Kong filmgoers seem to find that sight gag endlessly hilarious, and this movie isn't about to let them down.

The guy who plays the actual kungfu zombie is pretty damn good in his role as well. Though the white trousers and cape with no shirt look probably doesn't work for everyone (I've tried it several times), he manages to pull it off. I guess it helps that he is one of the living dead, well nigh indestructible, and can make his feet and fists burst into flames of fury. That's not the sort of guy you generally go up to and sneer, "Nice outfit, buddy."

*Kungfu Zombie* isn't an expensive film, and it does its best to cover the lack of funds by not aiming too high in the special effects department. Some eerie colored lighting, a few good and gross corpses, and a fog machine are all it needs to successfully create an inexpensive but interesting otherworldly feel. Since the movie is primarily about kungfu and secondarily about laughs, getting a good scare out of people isn't one of the top priorities. Still, the director manages some eerie shots, even if their eeriness is undercut by all the wacky goings-on. The movie is certainly put together a lot better than many of its contemporaries operating on a similar budget.

*Kungfu Zombie* is probably a better film for seasoned old school vets or people just looking for a severely twisted and delightful little mindwarp of a film. In the greater scheme of things, *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* is a better movie all the way around, and if you are looking for an introduction into the wild world of supernatural kungfu hijinks, you'll be better served by either *Spooky Kind* or *Mr. Vampire*, both of which are more successful in their comedy and chills, have better performances from actors and fighters, and simply had more money and talent behind them. Not that it's an insult to say something isn't as good as one of those two films. *Spooky Kind* was directed by and starred Sammo Hung, and *Mr. Vampire* had the benefit of Hung as a producer. In the late 1970s, early 1980s, no one — and I mean no one — was better than Sammo Hung. He completely revolutionized the kungfu film, delivering a level of energy and action that had never been seen and has never been matched since then.

So it's not so bad for *Kungfu Zombie* to be seen as sort of the plucky little brother of Sammo's better supernatural kungfu comedies. This movie was one of the defining elements of my journey toward being a kungfu film nutcase. It's crude and cheap, but it also has great energy behind it, not to mention some spectacular kungfu and a few creepy seconds scattered throughout the madcap zaniness. Although not the best example of the genre, *Kungfu Zombie* is a film I have a lot of fond memories of and still watch from time to time. Despite the loud performances and unlikable characters, the movie has charm and charisma. Watching it is like hanging out with old friends, even if you and your friends weren't the type to be resurrecting kungfu powered zombies to do your bidding.

**Lackey and the Lady Tiger (Hong Kong, 1980: Siao Lung, Norman Law)** - This Seasonal Films production is little more than a shameless rip-off of Seasonal's own *Snake in the Eagle Shadow*, with very similar casts (like Chiang Kam and the tailor from *Kung Fu Hustle*), a nearly identical plot (save the villain's motivation), and even a made-up style inspired by the movements of the cat.

Unfortunately, it lacks its inspiration's charm and charisma. Although Tien Niu (married to Shaw Bros veteran Yueh Hua) and Mars have some chemistry together (it's sort of like if Jackie Chan's Chin Fu from *SITES* were coached by the pre-Sam Seed Freddy Wong/Wong Fei Hung from *The Drunken Master*), their scenes lack the emotional component that made the teacher-student relationship so endearing in *SITES*. That makes the comedy-heavy first hour more of a chore than it would be otherwise.

Things only pick up after the first hour, when Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee gets out of jail and goes looking for revenge. Veteran choreographer Chan Siu-Pang, nearing the end of his career at this point, shows us that he was able to keep up with the times (unlike, say, Han Ying-Chieh) and gives us some solid action. The highlight is a short fight between Hwang and Linda Lin (the flexible wushu woman from *The Drunken Master*). They kick up a storm and make us wonder if she shouldn't have been the main protagonist, instead of Tien Niu. Hwang also gets to have a Strong staff duel with Shek Kin, probably doing a better job with the weapon than some of his others films. Mars is acrobatic, but the fact that he relies on tricks and made-up styles to win the finale just reminds us that Hwang is clearly superior.

It's not without its merits, although Hwang fans will probably come out of this wanting to rewatch *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Hell's Wind Staff* again.

**Lady Assassin, The (Hong Kong, 1983: Tony Liu)** - A curious title for this film, seemingly incongruous with the characters and story line that occupy the vast majority of the films running time. However, during the course of the film the relevance of the title slowly becomes clearer as the relationships between the supporting characters are developed.

The elderly Emperor is in failing health, and the narrative follows the intrigues of the evil 4th Prince (Lau Wing) in his efforts to deny the 14th Prince (Max Mok) his rightful inheritance. The film presents as a historical drama, replete with lavish costumes and sets, and liberally laced with fight scenes for good measure. Much emphasis in story development covers the political alliances between the Princes' and those that support and protect them. My only quibble is the noticeably sped up presentation of some action sequences, which does not wholly detract from the viewers enjoyment.

I actually found Lau Wing to be very believable in this role as a Prince/master swordsman, willing to both form and betray alliances in his quest for power. And generally get up to all forms of skulduggery along the way, yet somehow still maintaining a veneer of respectability. The modern day equivalent could well be the "white collar criminal" (?). Anyway, I have certainly grown to admire Lau's contribution to the Shaw catalogue, and must view the Emperor Chien Lung series for which he is best known.

Director Lu Chun-Ku also has a cameo playing a Japanese ninja to deadly effect. A stereotypical portrayal of a cold blooded monster that may have resonated well with audiences of the time, but completely at odds with the respectful, more dignified portrayal of the Japanese art I remember in Lau Kar-Leung's film *Heroes Of The East*.

As for the premise of the film's title, the narrative presents four possibilities, each of them skilled fighters. Which one I won't reveal, but her reaction to betrayal reminds me of the old adage - "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!!!". The end scene where she launches herself like a missile at her foe was very reminiscent of Yueh Hua at the conclusion of *The Twelve Gold Medallions*, if my memory is correct.

**Lady Constables (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung San-Yee)** - What a terrifically fun film this is to watch with nearly wall to wall action from start to finish. The fighting is inventive with a lot of interesting twists and a fair amount of wires being used. I haven't seen wires utilized nearly as much in any other of the Angela Mao films that I have seen, but it

is quite fun to see her somersault over her enemies or jump up into a tree to escape their blows. And as a bonus, not only do we get the wonderful presence of Angela, but also another of the better known female film warriors of that time, Judy Lee.

With slight echoes of the *Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, the film begins with the four bosses robbing the five shining pearls and killing the escorts. They then divide the booty and split off in different directions. There soon appear on their trail three separate individuals looking to track them down and capture them.

Angela Mao is the sheriff of the area in which the robbery took place. This is a different side to Angela than I have seen before. She has a bit of a mean streak as we first come across her torturing two suspects with a bamboo stake see-saw contraption. As she says later in the film "I don't really like killing. I prefer torture". Go Angela ! Other than her usual assortment of deadly kicks and punches, she also has these scarves that she shoots out from her sleeves to entwine her victims.

The second person chasing after the bad guys is Judy Lee – who had a relative killed in the attack – and is looking for revenge. Her weapon of choice is a twirling baton type object and she travels nowhere without a coffin at the ready for her enemies.

Finally the third hunter is the silent bodyguard of the Prince – who owns the pearls. He never talks – though he points out that he can – he just doesn't like to. So he communicates by various scrolls and always seems to have the proper one at hand to unfurl. His sword is also always near by with which he is quite deadly.

The three fight among themselves almost as much as with their enemies – and form shifting alliances – but slowly they track down the bosses and their gangs – one by one. Each little fight has something fun about it and the film rarely lets up for more than a few minutes.

As usual with these films, one has to wade through dreadfully dubbed dialogue. I lost count of the number of times in which Angela tells the other two – "I'm capturing these guys, you two stay out of the way". I only wonder if it's just as bad in Chinese.

Judy Lee is very impressive in this film with her wonderful twirling, killing baton. According to *Deadly China Dolls*, she was a classmate of Angela at the opera school. She made over sixty films and won the Golden Horse award in a film called *The Escape*. She retired from films in the early 1980's.

**Lady Hermit, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Ho Meng Hua)** - This final excursion from Cheng Pei-pei for the Shaw Brothers was a symbolically fitting one. Beginning with her successful run of martial arts films starting in 1965 with the groundbreaking and legend making "Come Drink with Me", Cheng Pei-pei had become an enormous star in Hong Kong, but she was now planning to retire and marry her Chinese-American sweetheart and move to the United States. The Shaws were looking for a replacement for her and thought they had one in the diminutive and very cute Shih Szu. Thus this film acts almost as an official handoff from Cheng Pei-pei to Shih Szu and the film makes the most of this theme with Shih's character being mentored by Cheng Pei-pei's character. I assume the reason that Shih gets more screen time than the established star is because the Shaws were grooming Shih to become one, but in the end it is still Cheng Pei-pei who gives the film its depth and poignancy.

Looking back at much of Cheng Pei-pei's output over these years, the films may in retrospect seem to range from average to solid with the charismatic actress often being their saving grace and the main point of interest for today's viewers. At the time though many of her films did quite well at the box office and both this film and her "Shadow Whip" were in the top ten at the box office in 1971. She did follow through on these retirement plans, but within a few years she had returned to Hong Kong and made some more martial arts films but not for the Shaw Brothers. Perhaps they thought her too old by then to take her back?

Cheng Pei-pei goes out with a blast – this is one of her better films that I have seen so far other than of course "Come Drink with Me" (these include "The Thundering Sword", "That Fiery Girl", "Whiplash", "Dragon Swamp", "Raw Courage", "Shadow Whip"). "Golden Swallow" is also one of the better films she was in but her diminished role in the favor of Jimmy Wang Yu has always been a sore spot with me. Part of the reason for the success of this film may be a switch from her usual director, Lo Wei, to Ho Meng-hua who paints a more personal and energetic canvass than Wei often did. This film was before Ho fully embraced the rougher elements he introduced in films like "Kiss of Death", "Oily Maniac" and "Vengeful Beauty", but certainly the body count is large in this fast paced martial arts escapade though most of it is saved for the final bloody twenty-minutes.

Cui Ping (Shih Sze) arrives in Dungan Town and trouble immediately follows her. She spots a man roughing up an elderly gentleman and attempting to steal his money and steps in with her flashing whip to beat off the attacker



and his two henchman. In the midst of fighting, she doesn't notice that she has some quick-handed help from a female onlooker. Cui is in town with a purpose – to find the legendary “Lady Hermit” who is famous for her martial arts skills but who has disappeared for three years. Cui wants to study under her in order to become number one in the world of martial arts and knows she needs a great teacher to accomplish this. She goes to the Du An Security Service where she finds Master Wang and one of his employees, Chang-chung (Lo Lieh) attentive but unable to assist her. She also meets the maid, Yushuang (per the subs, but most sources have her name as Chung Kuei), who is played by Cheng Pei-pei.

To no one's surprise, it turns out that of course Yushuang is the Lady Hermit, but after a serious injury that she received three years previously in a fight with the Black Demon (Wang Hsia) she has still not recovered (what do you expect – it was a “Shadow-less Claw” blow!). Over these three years she has been in hiding and biding her time to renew her duel with this villain. Cui has heard rumors that the Lady Hermit is in a nearby town, Biajiang Town, and she goes there to investigate. She comes across a few apparent walking dead who are killing the town's folks but who turn out to be humans beneath their masks. She soon finds herself surrounded by a multitude of villains and is rescued by a mysterious woman hidden underneath a white veil – The Lady Hermit has returned!

After much pleading and pouting, Yushuang takes on Cui as her student and the two of them begin training. Her injury still limits her ability, so she teaches Cui the “Flying Tiger” that she thinks will defeat the Black Demon's killing stance. She demonstrates this by tossing some poor cat high in the air and watching it land on its feet. While Cui is away on an errand, Master Wang is killed by the Black Demon's minions and now its personal for Yushuang. She tracks them down and tells them that one will lose an arm, another a leg and the final one his head – all three body parts are soon rolling on the floor. Almost ready to attack the fortress of the Black Demon, a rift divides the two women – love of course being the culprit – Yushuang and Chang-chung have had an unspoken affection for one another for years (until he tells her “You live, I live, you die, I die”) but Cui takes a fancy to Chang-chung as well and when she realizes where his love lies she decides to show them by taking on the Black Demon on her own.

Yushuang and Chang-chung chase after her and the dead bodies make the trail easy to follow as the film kicks into high gear with a series of terrific set pieces that leaves a swath of dead in its path. Cui knows when she has arrived at the doorstep of the Black Demon – he has a sign that reads “Number One in Martial Arts”! I enjoyed this thoroughly – not just the action, which is nicely done and often quite vicious – but what makes it all matter is the full development of the three main characters and the friendships that grow between them. When Yushuang shows up at the end to save her student one more time with a taunting challenge to the Black Demon from atop a wall adorned in her veil and broad low hung straw hat you feel like giving up a little cheer. The film also contrasts the two women sharply – one the older wiser almost world-weary warrior and the other naively ready to take on the world. Both are performed well by the two actresses who spill over with personality and graceful moves.

**Lady is the Boss (Hong Kong, 1981: Lau Kar-Leung)** - Lau Kar Leung gathers together all of his favourites from the Shaw's stable for this light hearted comedy. Although with less kung fu action than usual 'Lady is the Boss' still compares well to his other works and does feature a fantastic final reel.

Set in modern day, Lau Kar Leung plays Hsieh Yun, the master of a struggling kung fu school in Hong Kong. His own master has long since left for the states leaving the management of the school to Hsieh. When the government threatens to demolish the school to make way for a new road, Hsieh's master agrees to visit Hong Kong to handle the move to new premises. Hsieh is very much surprised when the masters' daughter, Chen Mei Ling (Hui Ying Hung) turns up instead. Mei Ling immediately starts making waves as she tries to bring in new westernised teaching methods and initiates a recruitment drive. This all brings her very much into conflict with Hsieh who steadfastly clings to the old ways and ultimately decides to quit. However he comes to the rescue when Mei Ling and her students get into trouble with local gangs led by Wang Lung Wei.

Lau Kar Leung was never content to just produce run of the mill revenge themed kung fu movies, his films work on so many levels and this is no different. Its especially interesting here to see how he uses themes such as old ways being surpassed by new fads and the battle between the sexes to flesh out a martial arts film into so much more. I've also always liked the way that he can put together dazzling kung fu battles which ultimately do not end in mass bloodshed and this is also another such film where nobody actually gets killed in the fighting. Technique and style taking precedence over any violence.

It was nice to see the likes of Gordon Liu and Hui Ying Hung in roles where they don't have to take themselves so seriously. Gordon Liu, especially, parodies his avenging monk character from the more traditional Shaw movies. At one point Hui Ying Hung gives them all a makeover in early eighties tasteless fashion gear which is very funny and gets even better when she takes them to a nightclub. Gordon Liu awkwardly strutting his stuff to disco music is quite unexpected and a world away from the straight faced monks he usually plays.

The action in the film is largely reserved for the last half hour or so and its Lau Kar Leung himself that takes centre stage, with some excellent kung fu displays in another superb fight with Wang Lung Wei. Gordon Liu, Fu Sheng, Wong Yu, Hsiao Hou and Hui Ying Hung all get their allotted screen time (which would be enough to make this film a must see anyway) but its Master Lau's graceful displays that really steal the show.

**Lady Karate (Taiwan, 1976: Ting Shan-Hsi) - aka Spy Ring at Kokuryukai** - LADY KARATE is the title under which this film can be found on YouTube. It is not to be confused with the kung fu film, LADY CONSTABLES, the film that both of the previous reviews on this page (by Blake Matthews and otakugrrl69) are discussing. That film stars Angela Mao and Chia Ling, the two greatest kung fu divas of the 1970s, and has its own IMDb page, where my review of it appears. LADY KARATE, which is also known as SPY RING AT KOKURYUKAI, stars Chia Ling as a real historical figure, a Manchurian princess and member of the Ching dynasty royal family who went by the Japanese name, Yoshiko Kawashima, after being educated in Japan and aligning herself with the Japanese war effort in Manchuria. She was a cousin of the famous "Last Emperor," Pu Yi, and was instrumental in getting him to resume the throne in Manchuria in 1934 as a puppet emperor for the Japanese. Under the name, "Eastern Jewel," she's a character in Bernardo Bertolucci's historical drama, THE LAST EMPEROR (1987), and she's also a significant supporting character in Ian Buruma's novel about actress Shirley Yamaguchi, "The China Lover" (2008). In addition, KAWASHIMA YOSHIKO (1990), a straight biopic, was made in Hong Kong by Golden Harvest and starred Anita Mui, a film I've also reviewed on this site. Finally, there's also a new biography entitled, "Manchu Princess, Japanese Spy: The Story of Kawashima Yoshiko, The Cross-Dressing Spy Who Commanded Her Own Army," by Phyllis Birnbaum.

LADY KARATE (1976) focuses on Yoshiko's mission to persuade Pu Yi to leave his comfortable existence in Tientsin and journey back to Manchuria to be the figurehead ruler of Manchukuo under the direction of the Japanese occupiers. She has ten days to finish the job or she'll be obligated to commit hara-kiri at the end of it, since she offered to do as much if she fails. She has enemies among the Japanese military who want to maintain control over Pu Yi themselves, as well as enemies among the Chinese patriots in Tientsin, including a group of students and newspapermen. One of the Chinese, played by Chang Yi, is a rather mysterious figure who has some connection to the royal family but has a public persona as a loser and a wastrel, yet runs around at night as an anti-Japanese masked avenger called the Plum Bandit. I never quite understood exactly who he was or what his goal was regarding the Emperor. At some points he seems to be opposing Yoshiko and at others they seem to be on the same side.

Chia Ling has quite a number of beautiful costume changes and is even dressed up in full geisha mode in a couple of scenes where she is seen managing a brothel in Tientsin. This is quite a welcome change of pace for the actress who usually played kung fu-savvy village girls in more traditional Chinese settings. Curiously, the girls in the brothel all appear to be Japanese, which seems kind of odd for that time and place. Nor is it adequately explained why Yoshiko's been given temporary charge of it when she's supposed to be on a larger mission. She has a couple of love scenes with Japanese military spies. The semi-nudity in these scenes, where we don't see the actress's face, leads me to believe that a body double was employed for Chia Ling.

Several action scenes are added to the mix and my guess is they were all a product of the writer's imagination. Chia Ling fights in only two of them. Early on, still in Japan, she's alone when attacked by Japanese agents for the military and fights them all off with an umbrella. Much later, while dressed as a geisha and working in the brothel, she helps spirit the Emperor away while using a sword and a knife to fight off Japanese swordsmen who have attacked the place. Other agents are involved in this fight as well. It's the more impressive of her two fight scenes and if there are any action highlights in the film, this one is it. There's also a full-scale military battle between Japanese soldiers and Chinese patriots in a forest that's presumably along the route to the university which the soldiers have been ordered to burn down. At the end, there's another gun battle between the Chinese and the Japanese, this time on the Tientsin waterfront, over the fate of Pu Yi.

None of this seems to have much historical accuracy, nor does it make much dramatic sense. For instance, when the Japanese soldiers launch their attack on the university it was all to divert the Chinese patriots so that the Japanese agents could take Pu Yi away in the commotion. Yet, the agents make no effort to do so, nor do they explain why they don't. Instead, the chief military agent goes off on a riverside picnic with Yoshiko when they're supposed to be getting Pu Yi out of the city. Confusion reigns in a lot of scenes like this. As for historical details, I noticed cameras, a radio and a 1970s model car that did not belong in this period setting.

The only other major actors I recognized in the cast are Chang Yi as the aforementioned Chinese patriot and Kam Kong as the head of the Japanese military spy unit in China. Some of the other actors are familiar faces from other kung fu films. There are two more beautiful actresses in the cast, in addition to Chia Ling. Sally Chen, aka Sha-Li

Chen, plays a guest of the royal family who turns out to be a Chinese patriot working undercover. The other plays Momoko, Yoshiko's Japanese personal assistant, and I'm unable to identify her.

This is not a particularly good film, but it is worth seeking out on YouTube if you're as fascinated by the subject as I am and if, like me, you're a devoted fan of Chia Ling.

**Lady Professional, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Matsuo Akinori, Kuei Chih-Hun)** - This was a lovely little surprise for an irredeemable "Girls with Guns" fan such as myself. Though the term was originated in the 80's with the explosive action films of Michelle Yeoh, Moon Lee, Yukari Oshima and others, there were certainly some predecessors that came before it – but for me this 1971 film has to be the earliest Hong Kong film I have come across that could fall into this category. In fact it has many of the elements that were to become common in the "Girls with Guns" films – revenge, empowerment and a female killing machine.

The slim and pouty Lily Ho might not seem to be the most likely candidate for a female killer bent on revenge with her limited action skills. She was much better known for her enticing and sexy roles and a year after this was to have one of her more scandalous roles in *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*. Born in 1946 in Anhui China, her family left for Taiwan after the Communist takeover. She was discovered while still going to school at the young age of sixteen and signed to a contract at Shaws. Between her first film in 1965 and her retirement in 1974 at the age of 28 after being married to a wealthy tycoon she was to appear in forty films and was an extremely popular actress in racy films, musicals and dramas. Here she doesn't display great physical skills, but she is very elegant and looks damn good holding a gun and that counts for something in my book.

The very clear influence of the wonderful Lee Marvin film, *Point Blank* (1967), is very evident here. Lily basically gets betrayed and begins working her way up the food chain, the old fashioned way - one death at a time. The film opens with her killing a man on a roller coaster – making ingenious use of her cosmetic case to both powder her nose and shoot deadly pins. She isn't a killer though, just a girl getting revenge for the murder of her father like any good daughter would do. She is spotted though by Xiaojing (Chang Pei-shan) who then begins blackmailing her for money over the next few years. When he is later offered a job to kill a witness played by Chan Shen (the traitor in *Cleopatra Jones* and the *Casino of Gold*) - who though knowing everyone is trying to kill him has no issue dining out and going bowling and neither do the not too bright cops - Xiaojing forces Lily to take up the assignment or he goes to the cops.

After she takes out the witness with a sharp needle to his throat, her employers do the old soft shoe double-cross and try to silence her. This turns out to be as good a decision as leaving your children with Michael Jackson – and even if she wasn't much in the way of being a killer earlier - a mere two notches on her belt - she learns fast and the notches multiply! She begins trying to work her way up through an industrialist (Huang Tsung-hsun) to his boss, Ching Miao. They don't plan on making it easy for her though and send a bunch of hired killers after her – at one time she has to take on a killer threesome of a knife expert and two strongmen (Bolo Yeung being one). She looks cool throughout and shows no mercy.

The film was directed by one of Shaw's imported Japanese directors, Matsuo Akinori (credited with the Chinese name of Mai Chi-ho) and he applies some nice touches and style to the film. His only other Shaw film (in co-operation with Nikkatsu) was *Asia-Pol* (1967) starring Jimmy Wang Yu and was a James Bond type movie, but he has Japanese film credits going back to 1959. The sets have a clean bright interesting look to them and a number of the scenes are shot on location – up on the Peak, the winding road from Aberdeen, the bowling alley, the fair – that give the film a somewhat authentic feel. Akinori also does some interesting camera work – in the first kill the camera is hand held and shaky and the POV is from the killer – and he often shoots from unexpected and intriguing perspectives. The film is a fair amount of fun – a bit slow at times – but with a nice flair that kept me entertained if not on the edge of my chair.

**Lady Snake Fist (South Korea, 1980: Lee Hyung-Po)** – aka **Yosa Martial Arts** - This was an absolutely dreadful *Drunken Master* clone hailing from Korea, with dull and uninspired choreography from people who should know better, lots of anachronistic non-sequiturs masquerading as comedy, and not enough of the title style on display. You'll be pining for other snake-themed movies, including *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, one of the film's direct forebears, after watching this dreck.

We open in modern times, with a woman walking down the street of a modern city, looking at some places that offer to teach martial arts or something. Suddenly, the opening credits play over a solid-red background and we get to the film proper, which is set...uh...I dunno when. During what period of Chinese history did you have drunken masters walking around with Western guitars playing ballroom dance music?

There's a girl (Carrie Lee) who hangs out with her friends, including Mike Wong, all of whom get in trouble with the local extortionists (one of whom I believe is Chan Muk-Chuen, one of the action directors). Our heroes win this fight via trickery, but later get beat down by a more powerful member of the gang, played by Korean actor Baek Hwang-Ki. They are saved in the nick of time by said drunken master (Gam Sai-Yuk), who beats the gang silly with his guitar. The girl decides that she wants to learn kung fu and begs both him and another master to take her in.

She eventually is taken in by the drunken master, but like Sam Seed in that movie, this guy's regimen borders on torture. Mike Wong ups and quits, but Carrie Lee takes it for a bit longer. Well, the extortion gang work for the richest man in town (Roman Lee), whose daughter (Sarah Sit) is being trained by a powerful fighter armed with a fan (Jackie Chen, note the "e" instead of an "a"). Said fighter has some beef with the two good masters, and beats the non-drunken master to death in a duel. The extortion gang gangs up on Mike Wong and beats him silly, while Fan guy humiliates Carrie in a duel. Carrie decides to take her kung fu studies seriously, finally.

Yeah, we've seen it all before and whatever Yuen Woo-Ping's flaws may be as a dramatic director, his strengths were on full display in both *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *The Drunken Master*. Here, the comedy is stupid, the story tired, and the fighting just boring. Taiwanese fight choreographers Chan Muk-Chuen (*Iron Monkey* and *Crippled Masters*) and Jackie Chen (*Fearless Dragons* and *Tai Chi Shadow Boxing*) have no excuse, beyond the fact that Chan Muk-Chuen was never that great of a fight director in the first place. The comedy-driven fights are slow; the fights involving a guitar standing in for a club are both slow, basic and lifeless; and there's not enough good snake style on display. Remember how in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, Jackie Chan's character discovered that his own Cat's Claw technique made the perfect complement to the Snake Fist? Well, in this movie, Carrie learns that Tango, Disco and Ballroom Dancing can complement the Snake Style just as well.

The action threatens to get interesting in the last 15 minutes. But then Carrie's fight with Roman Lee, the rich guy in town, is robbed of dramatic tension because the two have never interacted in any way at all during the film's running time, and so he's not deserving of the violent death he suffers. And then there's Sarah Sit's character, who's clearly not up to Carrie's martial arts level in the context of the movie, so it feels like an unfair fight when Carrie starts literally going for the throat. And there's the bit where Carrie literally transforms into Wonder Woman during the final fight, causing Jackie Chen to become literally hypnotized by her beauty, giving her the opportunity to strike him. \*Sigh\* It's all just goofy and silly, but not actually entertaining.

If you really must see a woman using snake kung fu, watch Sharon Yeung Pan Pan in *A Kung Fu Master Named Drunk Cat* instead.

**Lady Whirlwind (Hong Kong, 1972: Huang Feng) - Aka Deep Thrust - Lady Whirlwind** was released in January of 1972, which would place it somewhere between Bruce Lee's breakthrough film *The Big Boss* and his lauded classic *Fist of Fury*. I say this because it wouldn't be until after the latter that action director Sammo Hung would be able to understand the Little Dragon's choreography style enough to develop his own style and coax better fighting performances out of his co-stars, especially kung fu diva Angela Mao. In this movie, you can tell that Sammo has natural talent and potential, but still hasn't quite developed his game. That said, it's still a very fun basher and a deliciously-intense performance by Angela Mao. It's certainly light years ahead of **Super Manchu: Master of Kung Fu**.

So there's a gang who runs the local casino, headed by a hard-talking, whip-wielding b\*\*\*\* (Annie Liu) and her Japanese expatriate lover, Tung Gu (Pai Ying). When one of their number, Ling Shihao (Chang Yi), refuses to do some shady work for the gang, Ling is beaten by Tung and left for dead. He's found by a young lady, Xuang Xuang (Korean actress Oh Kyung-Ah—I think this movie was filmed in Korea, considering that when anybody speaks, you see the mist from their mouths and I don't think Hong Kong usually gets that cold) and nursed back to health.

Three years later, a kung fu bada\*\* named Miss Tian (Angela Mao Ying) shows up in town looking for Ling to settle an old score with him. When Tian goes to the casino and asks after Ling, the gang thinks that whatever beef she has with him is related to the gang's activities and makes the dumb decision to attack her. She gives them a walloping that their \*grandchildren\* won't soon forget. The next day, the gang has an encounter with Xuang Xuang, who reveals that she knows of Ling's "death". Miss Tian follows her and finds Ling, who has been training in kung fu for the last three years. Ling eventually convinces Tian to let him get revenge before their inevitable duel to settle Tian's past grievances.

*Lady Whirlwind* is a rather fun little basher movie. Like many early 70s bashers, the film is set in the post-Qing Dynasty Republic era and the villains are your typical local gang (brothel owners, casino owners, extortionists, the basics), plus a Japanese karate expert (Chin Yuet-Sang) thrown in for good measure. The movie doesn't reinvent the wheel or add any new twists to the formula, but ends up becoming a fun romp thanks to its main star.

If people like Michael Chan, Chan Sing, Yasuaki Kurata and Chang Yi were the Tough Guys of the early 70s, then Angela Mao was the Tough Girl of the same era. Her character, Miss Tian, is the definition of bad to the bone. She exudes confidence and mercilessness just like her male opponents, and at no point does she ever show the least bit of fear, even when facing down the karate master near the end of the movie. Where Chang Yi's character has to train in two different intervals to get good enough to defeat his adversaries, Angela Mao walks into the film ready to kick butt and chew bubble gum, the latter of which she must've left in Canton several weeks before. Her glare alone is more lethal than Alice's (from the Dilbert comics) "fist of death."

Sammo Hung was \*the\* action director for Angela Mao. He knew her abilities and had the God-given ability to give them the best exhibition possible. That doesn't quite happen here, but I think that both of them still didn't have *Fist of Fury* as a template as to how they should approach their fighting. So her kicks are frequently low and her hand strikes are still a bit flail-ly, but Sammo choreographs her fights so that they're fast and brutal. He ups the intensity beyond what you might've gotten from, say, the James Tien fights in *The Big Boss*, and the result is some of the more entertaining basher work out there. He also compliments the action with some stuntwork and even some crude and primitive wirework (people get knocked dozens of feet back or even get kicked upstairs and through the bannister). Angela throws in some basic acrobatics and does a few hapkido-influenced take downs as well.

Chang Yi's character has more of an arc, as a former lout turned petty criminal turned righteous avenger and affectionate lover. His early fights portray him in the flailing arms style of fighting, after which he evolves through training to something a little crisper (higher kicks, better hand techniques, although it's all still a little crude), and then comes the real treat: near the end of the movie, Chang Yi trains in tai chi chuan for the final fight. This is probably the earliest movie to portray tai chi as a combat style, predating the Shaw Brothers *The Shadow Boxer* (choreographed by Yuen Woo-Ping) by two years. However, outside of the philosophy that Chang Yi's teacher (a Korean herbalist!) explains, the actual tai chi displayed has \*nothing\* to do with the actual style. I don't think tai chi training includes jamming your open hands into pans full of rocks or performing jump kicks. Methinks that Sammo Hung wanted to do something more realistic, but that Raymond Chow pressured him to keep the status quo with his fight direction. So instead of actual tai chi chuan, we get Chang Yi perforating his opponents with knife hand strikes.

The other three important fighters here are Sammo Hung himself, Chin Yuet-Sang and of course, Pai Ying. Sammo, who was almost 20 at the time, shows up as the head henchman of Pai Ying and Annie Liu. His fighting is a little nondescript and he wouldn't stand out until *Hapkido* later that year. Chin Yuet-Sang, who would later become a celebrated action director of films like *Kung Fu vs. Yoga* and *Death Duel of Kung Fu*, played the obligatory karate villain, and gives a spirited performance. Pai Ying is just Pai Ying. He really doesn't have the action chops and it's a letdown that the filmmakers cast him to be the main boss for Chang Yi to fight. He doesn't embarrass himself in his fights like he did in *Super Manchu*, but he also doesn't have the gimmicks he had in that movie to fall back on. You know, I have enough things to watch now, but now I feel that it is my mission (well, one of many) to find out what Pai Ying's best physical performance was.

I really enjoyed the movie, especially for Angela Mao's intensity. I think all genre fans should check it out; there's a DVD available that's a double feature of both this and *Hapkido*. I would recommend that to fans, just so they can see how much Angela Mao and Sammo Hung progressed as a screen fighter and an action director, respectively, over the period of one year.

**Lady Whirlwind and the Rangers Hong Kong, 1974: Hou Cheng) - aka The Rangers; The Vigilantes** - The latest martial arts gem rescued from near obscurity by the fine folks at Crash Cinema is most certainly a shining example of what makes this genre so great. Long thought lost and only available in non-subbed (or non-dubbed) 5th gen import dupes, Lady Whirlwind finally makes a respectable appearance on DVD in the states. In the end, the result is nothing too spectacular, but at the same time, it's nothing too short of spectacular either.

It's turn of the century China, and one of the greatest commodities is salt. In turn, there are those who smuggle the salt, and then there are those who rob from the smugglers. Polly Kuan plays the daughter of the local sheriff who is wrongfully imprisoned after a frame up between the salt bandits and the local law enforcement. Hell bent on revenge, Kuan must first infiltrate the bandit's society and become their ally before she can even think of an attempt to take them down. Considering the fact that she's told time and time again that it's a shame she's a girl and that she would be able to do so much more as a man, she does the one thing that should earn herself the respect she seeks from the bandits. She has to disguise herself, so she does so as a man (natch) while her younger brother (almost unwillingly and I don't blame him) transforms himself into her younger sister. In doing so Kuan is one step closer to bringing the whole bandit's operation down from the inside and saving her father from certain doom.

Lady Whirlwind is just full of incredible fight and action set pieces that are extremely well timed and executed. In addition, the ensemble cast is a joy to watch (look for a young Sammo Hung in a supporting role) and it's also good to note the dub job is not too atrocious and never seems to get in the way either. With much more to offer than just great fights and non-eventful scenes to pull us to and from each one Lady Whirlwind stands as one of the true greats. Mixing the best of hard ass fighting and bits of light comedy, the result is pure and effective. The story never seems forced or contrived... we like these characters, empathize with them and feel for their struggle just about every step of the way. Sure it's silly at times and a bit-lighthearted... all elements that are used wisely here, ultimately to the films full advantage.

Polly Kuan is simply stunning as the title character Lady Whirlwind and is also one hell of a fighter to boot. She's quick, graceful and extremely easy on the eyes, she lights up the scene each time that she enters the frame. The fighting is fast and furious and it only makes me question why Polly Kuan is not a name that I've heard more of. The real beauty of Lady Whirlwind lies within its simplicity. It's not in your face or over the top, the fight scenes just are and it's a great and happy medium.

**Lady with a Sword (Hong Kong, 1971: Kao Pao-Shu)** - What a superb non stop action swordplay movie!! I had it since years and had never watched it as yet, but what an enjoyment!! While trying to get revenge for her sister's murder, Lily Ho discovers that the murderer is actually the man she has been engaged to since they were children. Lily Ho holds the whole on her shoulders and she is excellent!! Wang Hsieh plays the usual villain who gets what he deserves at the end of the movie. The child actor who plays Lily Ho's nephew is great too. A must see that hasn't been much discussed in the forum and should figure in any top...Shaws' movies !!

**Lama Avengers, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Wong Wa-Kei) – aka The Three Avengers** – Not a spectacular movie, but watchable. Bruce and his friend (Hon Kwok Choi we'll refer to him as UG for Ugly Guy) get kicked out of a opera troupe and start up their own kung fu school. Along the way the make enemies with a real estate mogul and his evil kung fu fighting son. Along the way Bruce takes on a gwailo student (let's call him Whitey). So Bruce, UG, and Whitey make up The Three Avengers. Whitey doesn't get too much screen time and in the fights scenes he usually gets beat down. The fight scenes are the usual Bruce Li boring stuff. There are a few funny scenes in the movie, if they are intentionally funny I'm not sure. Well since I'm not sure what else to write about I'll share all the gut bustin' scenes with you.

- Bruce and UG go to UG's house and get in a fight with some thugs. The fight climaxes with the destruction of UG's house. I won't really call it a house, or even a shack, maybe it's a shanty. I've seen cardboard boxes with sturdier construction.
- During the above mentioned fight UG punches some guy and his dentures fall out. The guy is in his mid-20's and he already has dentures?
- Now Whitey knows some chicks and him and UG go to meet them at the discotheque. UG is wearing the most ridiculous getup I've even seen. Whitey pushes UG into a dance contest and of course UG can't dance. So UG starts flipping and busting kung fu moves and poses, he even gets in some drunken style. The audience goes crazy! When he's finished he's mobbed by women who rip off his clothes. I'm not sure if they did this because they like him or can't stand to look at his clothes anymore.
- Bruce, UG, and Whitey are out having dinner and Whitey really likes what he's eating and orders another serving. When UG tells him he's eating tail meat he still doesn't understand. Then UG points to a guy skinning a snake and Whitey realizes he's been eating snake and runs off to vomit. Hahaha. Now they didn't use a stunt snake, or rubber snake, or use a digital one. The snake getting skinned was a real snake. I take it in Hong Kong there must be a lack of animal rights laws.
- Okay this bit of dialogue is classic. It's a bad guy talking to Lee Fu who is the son of the real estate guy. They are talking about how they're gonna get revenge on Bruce.  
Lee Fu "Well I'm going to." (referring to getting revenge on Bruce)  
Bad Guy "But how?"  
Lee Fu "Huh! I shall think of something really good!"  
Oh yeah that's real specific, but we all know what's he thinking. As I said that's classic.
- Now UG and Bruce are in another fight. A guy with a big knife comes at UG. UG points at the guy's crotch and says, "You're zip's undone." Of course the guy checks his zipper and when he does he gets a beating. At first I was like "That's lame!" but the more I thought about it, the more I thought I might work. I'll be sure to try it next time I'm attacked by someone with a knife.

Those don't seem that funny now that I think about it...sorry.

**Last Fist of Fury (South Korea, 1977: Kim Si-Hyeon)** - Okay, this South Korean Brucesploitation film stars Dragon Lee is best known for being tacked onto the documentary "The Real Bruce Lee." The story is pretty simple: Dragon Lee plays Siao Leung, a martial arts expert from China during the Japanese occupation, whose blood brother runs the Jing Wu School (no mention of Huo Yuanjia here). Said compatriot accepts a duel with the vicious Japanese fighter Yashioka, and is actually winning until a second fighter jumps into the mix and the two Japanese guys beat him to death. So Dragon Lee ventures into the city to avenge his death, which he ultimately does. So the remaining Japanese students hire a half-Japanese, half-German International Karate Champion to avenge them, despite the fact that Europe probably wasn't holding international karate tournaments in the days prior to WW2. Also, the guy's name is Gruber, so I can only imagine he's the father of Hans Gruber and Simon Gruber from the DIE HARD films. Gruber and his flunkies kill Siao Leung's master and kidnap his daughter, so it's up to Siao Leung to get his revenge.

So this film isn't very good. There's quite a bit of fighting, but it rarely elicited an emotional reaction out of me. I found that a bit odd, so I started paying closer to attention to what was onscreen. It became apparent that the photography of the fighting left a lot to be desired--we get a lot of shots with the stuntman's back to the camera, so when Dragon Lee kicks him, we don't really see the move in its entirety. There's the question of editing. There's a question of power and impact, which is sorely lacking from the fights--Sammo Hung may have been copying Bruce Lee in *Enter the Fat Dragon*, but he really put the right amount of power into the hits to up the intensity, without making himself invincible. There's the choreography, which was probably cobbled together and filmed so fast that we get a lot of sloppy, low-altitude kicks being performed, especially from the villains. 1977 was far too late for this kind of Jimmy Wang Yu bashery. In the end, it feels like a xerox of a xerox of the best of Bruce Lee's work, or even of Sammo Hung's work from *Enter the Fat Dragon*. The familiar elements are there, but it's not very pretty to look at.

**Last Hurrah for Chivalry (Hong Kong, 1978: John Woo)** - A merchant's son suffers the loss of his family to a family enemy; he tries to convince two renegade assassins to kill the enemy but as the story unfolds, things don't always seem as they appear....

Well, I thought I'd get back into watching martial arts after a self-inflicted hiatus by renting *Last Hurrah For Chivalry*, a John Woo wuxia/kung fu setpiece and lemme tell ya, it ain't a bad way to start! This comes from the Golden Harvest production stable in the late 70's but feels like a Shaw production from a decade earlier in at least a couple of ways. One is the very Chang Cheh-like themes that John Woo adopts in this (and other films) about revenge, brotherhood, and loyalty. And the interior sets, coupled with an atmosphere of dread and inevitability, evoke some Shaw/Cheh movies. However, IMO, the story runs a little tighter than most Shaws and the production is just a smidge better.

The plot is nice and twisty and very solid; at times, the story is almost spartan, with a lot of emphasis on the swordsman Chang and his rival/friend/contemporary Green. There is a lot of rogue philosophizing in this movie, usually of the "drink today, die tomorrow" variety but it does fit the tone of the story well. It seems to stall out in places, especially with a perfunctory love interest for both Green and Chang but it is not excessive and both actors (Wei Pai and Damian Lau) are good enough to carry interest through these scenes. Also, there is a lot of drinking, which I cannot condone (due to all the potential underage KFC people out there) but can neither condemn (did they even have water back in the day?) as I have been known to have a couple before I smash heads (mostly my own).

The action is great, really excellent and it gives me a new level of appreciation of Fung Hark-On, perpetual baddie and bad-ass in many other films. In LHFC, he is not only a cocky swordsman looking to make a name for himself, he is also the action choreographer for the movie and the action is fantastic. Very good use of swordplay and a nice mix with straight-up kung fu, with an emphasis on the less flashy wing chun, especially with Master Lee Hoi-San. I should note that there is some trampoline and wire work in here but is only slightly annoying towards the end battle. I was not too familiar with Wei Pai or Damian Lau but both are excellent in this movie and have a lot of skill. Any recommends to other movies they're in would be awesome!

I'm not going to spoil the ending although you are really, really naive not to figure out where this movie is going by the fifteen-minute mark. I recommend this without hesitation and now I've got to check out all of Fung Hark-On's catalog!!

**Last Strike (Hong Kong, 1977: Hua Shan) - aka Soul Brothers of Kung Fu; Kung Fu Avengers; Incredible Dragon; Tiger Strikes Again** - I'm not sure what's up with Mack Video... They keep rereleasing all of these movies with titles like Soul Brothers of Kung Fu when the movie only has one token brother who's kung fu sucks. This shitty kung-fu of course, gets him killed. Every damn movie they put out also has the previews for Black Spring Break and Soul in the Hole. It's as if they're re-releasing all of these movies as promo's for new ones. Anyway...

The two guys and this girl hop on a boat in one Asian country and barely make it to some other Asian country. My Asian history isn't too good and the movie doesn't give you much so if you know, give me a shout -- because I'm clueless. Hell, the movie's called Soul Brothers of Kung Fu. I was expecting some "Iron Fried Chicken" technique here, not some historical reenactment of something I don't know anything about.

So anyway, they barely make it. The two guys, Wong Wa Lun and Sao San, find jobs as dockworkers on Mr. Pao's shipyard where they find this black kid getting his ass kicked the shipyard boss because, well... he's black. They decide to help the kid out and beat the shit out of their boss, who of course, works for the mob.

So now we're to the meat and potatoes of the movie -- the mob is pissed at these guys and wants to off them. Sao San's gambling habit and Wa Lun's cocky fighting and bar-brawling attitude does nothing to help the situation.

Wa Lun's kung-fu is pretty good, so he starts fighting in professional tournaments to score some bread. He ends up making his way to the finals (which by the way has this hoaky Howard Cossell impersonator which is pretty cool...) Well, who happens to be his competitor in the finals? The mob's main lackey Ku Chin-complete with a James Hetfield mustache. This Ku Chin guys reaaaally sucks. He's slow and lanky and gets his ass kicked. So now the mob is even more pissed. So the mob goes and kills the girl and the final showdown begins which is only decent.

Oh yeah. This movie is called Soul Brothers of Kung Fu... So where's the "soul" at? There is one scene where the black kid throws a watermelon and Wa Lun takes a flying leap and explodes it. There's also some pretty funny dubbed jive and some cool soul and funk music throughout the movie. But what does the brother contribute to the movie? He drives the car, carries the luggage, and gets hung in the end.

Maybe the flick should've been called Slave Brothers of Kung Fu.

**Leg Fighters, The (Taiwan, 1980: Lee Tso-Nam) - aka Invincible Kung Fu Legs** - Tan Tao Liang was a Korean-born tae kwon do stylist who was best known in his films for having a left leg that he could use with as much coordination and flexibility as a third arm. Although he wasn't much for the aerial kicks, he could throw multiple high kicks, or combinations of kicks at various heights, without letting his foot touch the ground. The sad thing about his career is that he was quickly relegated to roles in low-budget Taiwanese movies and too many choreographers never knew how to milk his skills for all they were worth. On top of that, the truth was that Tan was never much more than his legs; he wasn't that good of a weapons user and his hand techniques were a bit weak. Furthermore, the man knew one style of acting: stoic hero, which really limited his roles. While his career was solid, his students, like John Liu and Yuen Biao, really had better careers and showcase films than he did.

*The Leg Fighters* was one of his later films, and probably one of his best overall films, period. The film was Taiwanese director Lee Tso Nam's attempt to make a kung fu comedy of the Seasonal formula: arrogant kung fu fighter resents new teacher, gets humiliated or loses a family member, trains more seriously, and then fights the bad guy. Here Tan plays the teacher, as playing the arrogant kung fu fighter would've been far past the man's acting range.

The movie begins with Master Tan (Tan Tao Liang) taking on the head of the Ground Kick school. Master Tan is able to beat him and, when the rival master tries to use treachery to win, Tan simply kills him. His brother (Peng Kong, *Woman Avenger*) swears revenge.

Meanwhile, a spoiled rich girl named Phoenix (Hsia Kwan Li, *Woman Avenger*) is training with what appears to be a sadistic kung fu master who's trying to force her legs into painful, but flexible positions. Her servant, Chin, tries to step in and help her by knifing the master to death, but gets humiliated and then beat up for his troubles. The next day, the master declares that he's leaving Phoenix's house to tend to his sick wife, and that he has asked for a friend of his to continue Phoenix's instruction.

That day, Phoenix and Chin are looking for an opportunity to show off their kung fu skills and see a group of men trying to rape a girl in public. A side note here, I would like to walk through a typical town in China during the 19th and early 20th century just to see how many people are randomly dueling in the street or dragging women off with



the intent to rape. In these movies, it seems to happen every other day. Phoenix and Chin beat the guys up, but seem intent on killing them when Master Tan shows up and humiliates Phoenix, telling her that she's gone too far. Lo! and Behold! Master Tan is her new master and she immediately takes a disliking to him.

After your usual comic interludes of failed methods to get rid of Master Tan (including a weapons duel that Phoenix pointedly loses), Phoenix and Chin go to a restaurant where they run afoul of an arrogant kung fu master named Master Ding Dong (because he wears a bell on his person, honest!). Having beat him, Ding Dong goes for his colleague, Dong Dong (I swear I'm not making this up) and together they start getting the best of her. Only when Master Tan shows up and (if I heard correctly) suggests that Ding Dong and Dong Dong rape Phoenix that Phoenix agrees to take Master Tan as her master and Tan steps in and beats them up. After that, Phoenix begins her training.

Meanwhile, remember the guy who swore revenge at the beginning? Well, he has begun a campaign of death in order to find Tan's whereabouts. No sooner than he has found Tan, then Tan must make a decision whether to stay at the manor and risk the family's life, or take on the Master of the Ground Kick by himself.

Yeah, so there isn't a whole lot of difference between this film and *Drunken Master* or *Hell's Wind Staff*. Heck, even the laxative gag was taken from the latter film, made two years before. Kind of makes me wonder if the makers of *Major Payne* saw these films when they wrote that gag into the script. The only real difference between this film and the other kung fu comedies made from 1978 on is that main protagonist is a beautiful woman, and not a guy. Other than that, the film's emphasis on kicking techniques from practically all characters is also a bit different from most films of the era.

I guess I'm a bit stupid for complaining about the plot, but the truth is that it's not put together all that well. It takes far too long for Phoenix to accept Tan as her teacher and, when she finally begins her training, we're already in the last act of the film. The training sequences aren't all that memorable, either. In *Drunken Master*, the training portions of the film took up practically the entire middle portion of the film and were both interesting and funny, to boot. That's not so much the case, here.

Nonetheless, the saving grace of so many of these films is the action and action director Peng Kong does a fine job here. Tan Tao Liang looks as good as you could expect him to with some fine bootwork, especially the film's later fights. Hsia Kwan Li gets to perform some very flexible kicking and some solid weapons work (maces, pole, and sword). Peng Kong also looks great, performing a Ground Kick style that utilizes a lot of tumbling, somersaults, and kicks, in addition to some Southern Eagle that he calls the "Nine Birds Technique". Kudos goes to Peng for the fight between Tan and a chi kung/iron vest fighter, as Peng comes up with a very novel way for Tan to beat the guy without the usual one weak spot method.

I give this film a hearty recommendation for accomplishing what it sets out to do: show off lots of bootwork. Tan kicks great. Hsia Kwan Li is very beautiful and mixes some of Yukari's Oshima's flexibility with a happy, arrogant Polly Shang Kwan Ling Feng style of acting. Peng Kong is a solid villain and a good action director. The film isn't art, but the martial arts sequences are.

**Legend of a Fighter (Hong Kong, 1982: Yuen Woo-Ping) aka The Secret Master** - Most of you have seen or heard of this movie. It is based on the story of Fok Yuen Gap, a real-life practitioner of martial arts. His story has been told different times: once as Bruce Lee's **Fist of Fury** and the other as Jet Li's **Fist of Legend**, a permutation on a permutation. Then there was **Fearless**, another portrait of Fok Yuen Gap by Jet Li; clearly this story has a lot of mileage! The basic story is that Yuen Gap wanted to be trained in his father's style but his father had other ideas for him and instead wanted him to be a scholar. His father hires a teacher, who surreptitiously teaches him kung fu. The story is part myth and part biography but makes for a iconic Chinese character who became popular for his stance against foreign influence in China. **Legend of a Fighter** gives a gripping story of this man's development through his father and his teacher to break the chains on both time-honored tradition in kung-fu and China's demoralized populace.

I'll make no bones about it, this is my **favorite kung-fu movie right now**. I think it is an outstanding portrait of a man who constantly had to battle a strong-willed father, bullies, and the concept of kung-fu as being the hereditary right of families to teach. It really transcends a lot of typical kung-fu cliches by instilling the story into a family drama, with a father surrogate in the form of Yuen Gap's teacher.

Another element that makes this movie stellar is the powerhouse performances by the two leads: Leung Kar Yan as Fok Yuen Gap and Yasuaki Kurata as Chiang Seng-Ho. This, I think is the performance of Leung Kar Yan's career. A lot of kung fu movies have very little emotional spectrum. It usually goes from grief to anger and that's about it (maybe

a little blind rage every so often). But Beary really shows a lot of emotion in this role, from pride to righteous anger to disappointment and confusion. He fights back tears at one point and it was the first time in a kung-fu movie where I had to do the same. He invested a lot into this role and it shows. Mr. Kurata is stunning as Chiang Seng-Ho, a Japanese sent to discover the Fok style of kung-fu by posing as a sickly teacher. He takes to the young Yuen Gap and becomes his teacher and even a father figure, as Yuen gap's own father is more concerned with the propriety of his family's name than Yuen Gap. I think Kurata gave this role the nobility and grace it deserved. He plays a character who is duplicitous yet has standards and compassion that transcend nations or cultures. In Japan, I believe they would say his character embraces the true spirit of budo.

The topper are the action sequences and this is where both Yuen Woo Ping and his cast really come together well on this one. Beary's skill in mimicry dissolves into a performance that I would call one of his top three, a fluid combination of martial arts that is not purely kung-fu as he battles opponents of different styles and arts. His confidence and poise is just fantastic and he even gets some good kicks in that he wasn't doubled for! And I think this may be Yasuaki Kurata's premier performance, a bit understated compared to some other movies he's been in, but if anyone disagrees, please let me know which movie he does better than this one. Hi agility, kicks and strength are at their peak in this dynamic performance. Why do I think this guy is so under-appreciated? He is one of the best action stars in HK history. It could be a bit of a cultural thing, but this man is the \*\*\*\*. Yuen Woo Ping has got some of his trademark stuff going on here, including goofy kung-fu bits, forced perspectives, and a flair for complex sequences that are deliciously intricate. One of my favorites from him.

Some of the other reasons I feel this movie is a masterpiece are the strong cast, including a great performance by Phillip Ko Fei as Yuen Gap's stubborn, proud father. His forms are looking pretty good in here and he has a nice fight in the beginning sequence. He also is great as a gruff father who realizes his mistake later on when Yuen Gap develops into a man. Yuen Yat Chor is good as the slightly goofy teenage Yuen Gap, a ne'er do well that wants his father's approval but is not initially cut out for rigorous kung-fu training. The several opponents are suitably nasty, including Lee Ka Ting as Yasada Junior, a judo champion who comes looking for Yuen Gap to best him. His aggressive demeanor contrast nicely with Yuen Gap's composed style. SPOILER\*\*\*\*\* And his defeat sets in motion a reunion that manages to demonstrate the frustrations of Chinese people with their Japanese aggressors while also handling the central relationship of this movie between a student who must learn to transcend boundaries and teacher who must fight for his nation's honor. \*\*\*\*\*END.

I can no think of too many flaws other than my Bonzai DVD is getting a little worn and I wish the perspective could be tweaked a bit. It is without any hesitation that I think this is the best kung fu movie I have seen and one of the best movies from this period of Asian cinema.

**Legend of the Fox (Hong Kong, 1981 – Chang Cheh)**- Having seen it just once before and forgotten most of it(thing too that it's basically same as NTOFF), was time to give it revisit....I think story is not hard to folliow but some concentration is needed. Roughly it involves usual stuff, young man ( chin siu ho ) looking to avenge his parents. Based on novel, it was also used in "new tales of flying fox" although there are some differences in storylines between those two movies. I prefer New tales over CC effort...

For 2 hours it felt bit overlong although can't say it dragged. Major complaint is about casting, chiang sheng has rare role as villain and completely unconvincing in that. Lu Fend and him should have traded places..Not so excited about CSH as lead but he does ok...

Action is good, not among best by Venoms but there are some nice swordfights, peak point was kwok choy vs lu feng.I loved specially part of their fight where blades do not connect even as they are very close to each other. Brilliant choreography.

It's not there with finest venom movies but entertaining enough. Still I would recommend to check "new tales of flying fox" instead of this for those unfamiliar with flicks and if like it then investigate LOTF.

**Legend of the Owl (Hong Kong, 1981: David Chiang)** - John (David) Chiang's anything goes, sublimely stupid send up of the wu xia sees his Captain Fan attempting to rescue the Emperor's 36th wife from the title evil auctioneer.

It's just as hilarious and silly as the the first two times I've seen it, but I clearly caught the make fun of Chor Yuen's wu xia and Chiang's former bro-in-arms Ti Lung with the character who played Derek Yee's "father." Not only is

this guy dressed in a costume nearly identical to the Sentimental Swordsman, but if you have no clue how to properly pronounce Ti's name (I didn't until Kung Fu Bob told me), you could presume it's literally Ti Lung and not Di/Dik Loong. And if you went by the incorrect pronunciation and noted this retired swordsman has tuberculosis... well... yikes.

That goofy swipe aside, *Owl* remains wonderfully stupid and a hoot to watch. My favorite scene is the wise-cracking Cantonese talking Cockatiel who does a mission impossible after she delivers her message to Chiang's Captain Fan. As I've happily discovered, John is a terrific comedian who is clearly so amused by his own image, he'll happily butcher it for a few laughs. And there are plenty of laughs in this film. If you like slapstick, satire (especially ripping American blockbusters and Shaw Brothers a like), you'll probably enjoy this.

**Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires, The (Hong Kong/Great Britain, 1974: Roy Ward Baker) – The Seven Brothers Meet Dracula** - LEGEND OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES is one of the many names of the semi-classic hybrid vampire horror/kung fu production by famed British horror studio Hammer and the Hong Kong Shaw Brother's studio starring Peter Cushing on one hand and David Chiang on the other.

Somewhere in the nineteenth century the Chinese high priest of the "Seven Golden Vampires sect" comes to Transylvania to beg the vampire's high lord Dracula (John Forbes-Robertson) to save his sect from decrepitude. The fiend's answer to the plea is to possess the priest's body, take on his appearance and head-off to China. Decade's later occultist and vampire hunter, Professor Van Helsing (Peter Cushing) arrives in China with the hope of doing research on the eastern variety of vampires. He is stunned to learn from a local named Hsu Ching (David Chiang) of the validity of an ancient legend about the Seven Golden Vampires oppressing a small village deep inside China. Hsu is actually a native of the village and asks Van Helsing for help in exterminating the vampires. A small expedition is organized that is made up of Van Helsing, his son Leland (Robin Stewart), Mrs Vanessa Burden (Julie Ege), an adventurous young wealthy widow, and Hsu with his six brothers and one sister (Shih Szu). The brothers and their one sister are all deadly masters of Chinese martial arts. It's won't be an easy outing as the party will have to come face to face with the seven deadly vampires themselves, their un-dead army of ghouls and the arch-fiend himself...Dracula.

For nearly fifteen years starting in the mid-fifties, Hammer films had delivered classic horror pictures based often on the mythic figures of Dracula and Doctor Frankenstein. By the early seventies however the studio was in a state of creative burnout, so when the kung fu movies hit the western world with such fare as FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH (1972) and the Bruce Lee films, Hammer's head Michael Carreras came-up with the idea of mixing western type genres such as the action thriller and of course horror with martial arts. He thus contacted Hong Kong's biggest studio, the Shaw Brothers, and they made a deal to produce a pair of films combining each others strengths. Shaw Brothers provided exotic locations, a stuntman /action crew, and some of their stars while Hammer would also provide some stars and handle the film scripting, direction, as well as cinematography. In the case of their joint thriller SHATTER (1974) starring Ti Lung, Lily Li, Peter Cushing and an American B movie actor named Stewart Whitman the end result proved quite dismal. With LEGEND their efforts proved somewhat better.

LEGEND more than adequately recreates Hammer's creepy gothic and lurid atmosphere and is a solid piece of film all around - with great sets, an excellent musical score and featuring Peter Cushing at his suave delightful best (this would be his last Van Helsing interpretation). The kung fu action isn't that successfully integrated though. As done by Shaw Brother's own house fight arrangers, Tang Chia and Lau Kar-leung, it's good enough choreography-wise, but lacks the cinematic over the top dynamism that could already be found within Hong Kong martial art's productions. Furthermore it takes nearly half an hour for a first small fight to occur and the first real big battle comes nearly halfway through the film. Establishing LEGEND's premise of a vampire adventure deep inside China consumes nearly as much time and feels especially slow and cumbersome by Hong Kong cinema narrative standards.

LEGEND wasn't directed by some two bit director, but by Roy Ward Baker, one of Britain's finest and most respected B movie craftsman, who did such s-f/horror classics as QUARTERMASS AND THE PIT (AKA: FIVE MILLION YEARS TO EARTH) (1966), DOCTOR JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE (71), who as a TV director did countless episodes of THE AVENGERS, THE SAINT and SPACE 1999 and back in 1958 did what was regarded for forty years as the best Titanic movie A DAY TO REMEMBER. It's likely thanks to him that LEGEND didn't end-up a lame bore-fest like SHATTER did. Yet many years later Baker did say. "One could have done tremendous things with it. But (they) just didn't occur to me until after I shot the bloody thing" (Bey Logan's HONG KONG ACTION CINEMA pp: 103). True enough, as LEGEND is a far cry from the relentless energy and madcap inventiveness found in such later classics as CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE SPOOKY KIND and MR VAMPIRE and for the most part lacks any real fright sparks or original

ideas as the horror consists mostly of decrepit looking ghouls running amok, the main special effect is the disintegration of the ghouls into smoking piles of ashes and bones, and the most stunning scenes are those done in a sacrificial room where the seven Golden Vampires feeds on bare-chested Chinese maidens.

Furthermore, besides being relatively uninspired, the script also betrays the writer's all but non-existent knowledge and appreciation of its Chinese setting beyond some well-worn superficial clichés. Of all the Chinese characters featured in the movie only David Chiang has any extended lines and he comes across as a pretty bland ever-serviceable ethnic sidekick. And while it takes the movie forever to set-up the premise, the final act feels very rushed.

Curiously enough, Dracula makes only two token appearances at the very beginning and end of the movie, so arbitrary and brief, one might wonder if Dracula wasn't a last minute addition to the picture so as to capitalize on the notoriety of his name, although this is mere speculation. In any case though, the limited exposure of the character, the diva camp manner in which he is played and the easy way in which Van Helsing deals with him makes him rather superfluous and useless. Another funny bit is the actual Chinese title - SEVEN GOLDEN CORPSE. There is no mention of Dracula or even of vampires since no such brand of folkloric creatures exist in the east. So instead they are referred to as the seemingly nearest equivalent, the "jiang shi" or stiff corpse zombies seen hopping around most notably in the MR VAMPIRES movies. In China though they are not known to bite people or drink blood and in LEGEND they hardly do any hopping. On the other hand, they do really look like rotten corpses.

Actually, for today's audience, LEGEND might be considered more fun and interesting for it's dated as well as dubious sexual and racial politics than for any of its attempts at chills or kung fu action. We have David Chiang playing a sort of helpful bland manservant, but there's also buxom-beauty Julie Ege having the part of an assertive Swedish rich young widow, who in the story conducts a solitary world tour and finances the vampire outing. She's also called for to shed a piece of her outer clothing as well as to flirt with Chiang in a romantic bit that feels as right as one would between Little Tony Leung and Amy Yip if played seriously. Considering Hammer's pseudo-Victorian morality it's not hard to guess how this peculiar character will end up. On the other hand Van Helsing's son Leland is almost immediately smitten by cute fighting tigress Shih Szu and soon enough Leland has his hands and mouth all over her in a cute way of course and under the approving eye of David Chiang's character and his other siblings. Right! As if any red-blooded Chinese brothers would allow a gweilo to flirt with their sister. Finally, in the showdown with the brothers numbers (for all their fighting skills) is quickly dwindling, the tentative romance between David Chiang and Julie Ege comes to a really biting end leaving only Van Helsing and son to rescue Shih Szu and deal with Dracula. So much for the titular seven brothers and their kung fu.

Of the eight siblings only David Chiang gets to really play a character. The rest are only differentiated by the weapons they use: sword, spear, bow, battle-axes, and spike-bats (Chiang is the only one to do true hand to hand fighting). Future kung fu star/director Lau Kar Wing plays the archer, while future kung fu villain Fung Hark-Onn plays one of the two sword-wielding siblings. But one would have to read his name in the film credits or have really sharp eyes to know that he participated in the movie however, as no close-up is ever used on him. As for Shih Szu, she uses a pair of daggers. Her dance background makes her fluid and fast but her visible lack of power makes her fighting prowess rather transparent. She was probably better suited doing straight sword-plays rather than kung fu.

Actually, Shih Szu was meant to be Cheng Pei Pei's successor as the Shaw Brothers swordplay queen, but the emergence of male dominated kung fu movies added with the fact that Chang Cheh, Shaw's lead martial director, had little use for women warriors or for that matter women period, short-circuited her career. She still appeared in plenty of pictures, some good (JADE TIGER (76) some not: (the H-K/Italian hybrid co-production SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT where she dresses in a yellow superman suit) but never became as huge a star as her predecessor and is one of the least known of all the major seventies female martial warriors. Quite ironically in LEGEND where she has only one short speaking line (perhaps because she knew no or little English) and played the part of a lovely exotic fighting cutie is nowadays the only film of her to have really ever stuck in the western world (though she has a very nice section devoted to her in the documentary Deadly Fighting Dolls).

LEGEND, did not do very well in Hong Kong back in 1974. It also got a more commercially savvy title DRACULA AND THE SEVEN GOLDEN VAMPIRES even though Dracula's screen time amounted to no more than 5 minutes. The attempts by Hammer to revitalize its products having failed both commercially and artistically, folded around the mid seventies. LEGEND did not reach the US shores until 1979 in which it was horribly cut, re-edited and given the ludicrous title SEVEN BROTHERS MEETS DRACULA (which never actually occurs in the film itself). By then the kung fu wave had been long gone and the film was released perhaps only to take advantage of the classy DRACULA production starring Frank Langella. In the nineties however the film was released in video format in a restored, letterbox, uncut format making it the finest looking Shaw Brother product available to this day. It is mostly recommended for those who want some jolly good fun, or those remembering the good old days of Hammer, old school Shaw and.....goofy political incorrectness.

**Legendary Strike, The (Hong Kong, 1978: Huang Feng) - aka Iron Maiden** - Though there is not a lot of action in this film, it has an intriguing plot that will keep the viewer interested. It is full of conspiracies, betrayals, hidden identities and a search for a sacred treasure. It has a fine ensemble cast with Angela Mao, Carter Wong, Mars and Chu Kong among them.

A Ching Prince (Carter Wong) secretly sells a sacred pearl to a Japanese emissary, but he has set forth a devious plan so that he can get the pearl back. The emissary suspects evil doing and hides a fake pearl in his hair and swallows the real one. On his way back, the Japanese is attacked by Mars (Jackie Chan's partner in Police Story I) and is killed. A fellow who claims to be a Shaolin monk then sets upon Mars and in the ensuing fight Mars is killed. All this has been watched by Chu Kong (Sydney in The Killer) and only he is aware that the pearl has been swallowed by the emissary.

Chu steals the dead body of Mars and soon the Chings and a fellow Japanese are in pursuit. Soon dead bodies and coffins are getting mixed up and no one seems to know why they are all after Mar's body. At one point – about 30-minutes into the film Angela makes her appearance. One of the coffins is tracked down and opened – only to have Angela in it - who then winks at her very surprised spectators.

Angela it turns out is a Korean rebel and she soon teams up with Chu to fight the Chings. This leads to some good fighting in the last thirty minutes of the film. The fighting is particularly interesting because Angela and Chu are more than evenly matched by Carter Wong and his henchmen.

This is a pretty good film for the most part – a little disappointing in terms of fights – but a solid plot, some suspense and good performances from Angela and Chu make this one of Angela's better films.

**Legendary Weapons of China (Hong Kong, 1982: Lau Kar-Leung)** - The film's plot revolves around the movement of the spiritual boxers, so around the time of the boxer rebellion, which was in 1901 I think. The spiritual boxers were people who trained in supposed god skills kung fu, this supposedly was to beat the foreigners and their guns. Obviously this was a huge sham. The story is set with a fantastic display of the weapons of China, this is performed by the film's star and Chinese opera veteran Hsiao Ho, who shows skills with the weapons and insane gymnastics, also Kara Hui (Austin Wai's sister) displays some of the weapons.

We meet the leader of the boxer movement played by Chu Tiet Wo (Tiger over Wall, Martial Club) who sends out his top student (Hsiao Ho) to go and assassinate a traitor (Lau Kar Leung), soon other assassins are sent out as well to find and kill the traitor, (the other assassins are Gordon Liu and Kara Hui who ends up helping Lau Kar Leung's character). Soon they discover Lau Kar Leung's character who pretends to know nothing of kung fu, until Kara Hui who ends up befriending Hsiao Ho finds all 18 weapons of China in his house.

Also hot on Lau Kar Leung's trail is his real life brother Lau Kar Wing, soon the boxer gang leader comes after Leung, and the stage is set for a hugely enjoyable and fantastic film with one of the best finales of all time. *Legendary Weapons of China* is so much fun, it has so much cool stuff, like the secret weapons, the fights and all the acting is great fun, special mention has to go to Fu Sheng (Boxer Rebellion, Shaolin Avengers) who tragically died in 1982 in a car crash. Here he has a extended cameo as a conman and gets to show some cool moves.

Lau Kar Leung who had made classics like *My Young Auntie*, *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* and *Invincible Pole Fighter*, gives us here his finest film. Lau Kar Leung is so cool in this film, not only does he deliver his classic shapes but the final duel with Lau Kar Wing features all 18 weapons! The finale is breath taking, but other fights in the film that really stood out was Lau Kar Leung against Chu Tiet Wo and when Gordon Liu turns up and fights Hsiao Ho and Kara Hui. People watching this for Gordon Liu won't be disappointed he isn't the star but gets a great fight!

The biggest highlight action wise is the Lau family duel and Hsiao Ho, I go on about him all the time, but this guy is crazy! His other stand out roles are *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* and *My Young Auntie*, this guy can do anything gymnastic wise, and he is like made of rubber! There's a bit where he fights Kara Hui in a narrow alley and he does the splits up against the wall (Ho doubled Wang Lung Wei for some of the more unhumanly splits in *Martial Club*). Kara Hui gets a fair amount of action and shows that she can do the splits with the best of them, Kara Hui, Hsiao Ho, Gordon Liu etc were all part of Lau Kar Leung's action team, along with people like Wong Yu, Wilson Tong and Ching Chu (who appears in this film).

This film is kung fu poetry and is sublime to say the least, i can't praise it enough, the sets, music, acting and the action choreography is amazing, so please go and buy this film! Overall i give this film a definite 5 out 5! I'm now hunting down every Lau Kar Leung film i can.

**Leopard Fist Ninja (South Korea, 1981: Nam Gi-nam) - a.k.a Return Of The Twin Dragons** - A small Korean village is being terrorized by a gang of sadistic Japanese fighters. They kill a man and his wife for refusing to reveal the location of a secret manual. Their two sons are saved by their grandfather who escapes from the tiny Korean village. They then learn the art of Kung Fu, so they can one day return to their home and get revenge.

Jack Lam unleashes his deadly arsenal of lethal kicks in this highly unoriginal Martial Arts film. Here he's paired up with 1970s Korean cinema regular and hard man Baek Hwang-Ki (Five Pattern Dragon Claws). Baek normally plays the villains right hand man but here he refreshingly plays one of the good guys, playing Lam's brother in the movie. Most of the characters are never given names and there's little information about the cast on the KMDb/HKMDb. In some cases I could not even find the actors names. Godfrey Ho is credited as director on the international English language version that I watched. It turns out he's simply added his name onto the credits, the real director was a Korean called Nam Gi Nam. Not the first time Mr Ho's done this either so it came as no surprise. Having not watched the original Korean cut of this I can't say what alterations or other changes he has made if any?.

The story is a well told one and the filmmaker's haven't even tried to do anything original with the idea. There's the usual heavy dose of national pride. It's one of those stories where everyone would rather die than become a traitor. The Japanese characters are portrayed to be very over the top and low on IQ. Thanks to the English dub all the characters with the exception of Jack Lam's appear even more dim witted. During the opening scene some thugs are ordered to search a dead body for a book "search his body, every inch of it, I want that book". The two thugs simply pat the guys shoulders a bit and inform their boss the book's missing. What makes it even funnier is the boss is supervising them whilst they do this. If you enjoy bad English dub jobs then this film will not disappoint you. The film's soundtrack by Ricky Chan is heavily influenced by the Italian Western scores. When the film's opening credits roll we see Lam's character in a poncho wandering the bleak Korean countryside to the sound of a catchy European style western riff. They may have lifted the song from another movie?, but if they have it's not a track I'm familiar with. This might not be the best example of a Martial Arts film but I really like how they have staged the credit sequence. Another one of my favorite scenes sees Lam training/mediating on a small frozen waterfall. Bear in mind he performs this scene topless despite the cold weather conditions.

It's a good fifteen minutes until the action really starts to literally kick off. The fight scenes are peppered with some spectacular and at times highly original moves. The high kicking action handled by Charles Yuen really deserved a much better showcase than this poorly made low budget production. I couldn't find any information regarding the fight choreographer and I felt the name might be an alias?. Either that or Godfrey Ho simply added his own misleading credits over the original ones?. Our two heroes are joined by a woman who's been wronged by the same Japanese villains. Sadly I can't find any details about the lady online. She's a very capable screen fighter who shows off some great skills. Hwang-Ki always showcases some nice moves and he really holds his own here. It's worth watching the film based purely on the fight scenes. If you can handle or should I say endure the other lesser parts of the movie. The action does have some weaker moments mainly involving the foreign actors who have been drafted in for some scenes. Luckily they don't give them too much screen time because none of them appear to have any fighting skills. Jack Lam is one of those old school performers who really deserved more from his career. He only appeared in a small number of movies after making his debut in *The Divine Martial Arts Of Dharma*(1978). His skills are up there with many of the great super kickers of the 70's. The one thing this film really gets right is showcasing his talents. Being a Korean movie the action is very kick heavy but you do get some hand techniques displayed too. He displays some Leopard fist techniques but sadly they don't give it that much attention. Lam's character has some wrist bands on each arm that hold small knives. These only get used to kill a pigeon which he then BBQ's. BBQ pigeon I hear is a favorite of nomadic heroes in the Martial World. No idea why they didn't make more use of the knives in the film's many fight scenes?. This production will leave questioning a lot of its content.

You may have noticed there has been no mention of ninja, that's because the film doesn't feature any. Another case of the international distributors trying to cash in the 80's ninja craze. Before I wrap this review up there still a few things I'd like to quickly mention. There's a random cameo by Ga Hoi who has a brief and well executed fight with Jack Lam. His character is not introduced and he disappears without any explanation too. Looking at the fight it appears he is doubled a lot too. Considering Godfrey Ho's style the brief Ga Hoi footage may have been inserted from another film?. It just seems so odd to waste his talents on one scene that really doesn't fit into the rest of the picture. If only he had a bigger role in the film, it could have been so much better. What it really lacked too is some capable and skilled villains. Chiu Chun(*Hand Of Death*) is more suited to playing the main villain's lackey. Here he's given the part of the gang leader and it lets the film down. It doesn't help when he's surrounded by fighters with

little to no skill. You just know Lam, Hwang-Ki and the woman are going to wipe the floor with them all. Casanova Wong would have been a great addition to the cast as Japanese fighter and bodyguard for Chun's character. This film has many faults but it still features some great if a little brief Martial Arts encounters. If you are Jack Lam fan & enjoy the old school Korean flicks its worth watching. Anyone else might want to avoid this one.

**Life Gamble (Hong Kong, 1979: Chang Cheh)** - I still love this film as much as I did when I first watched it 6 months ago. Large casts usually intimidate me (whether it's films, novels etc.) So it was particularly refreshing not to get lost in this Chang Cheh spaghetti western homage about Master Nan's stolen amphibious shaped Jade everyone and their slimeball uncle and auntie wants.

We have a variety of bad people, Lo Meng's dagger wielding swordsman Mo Jun Feng, Lu Feng's scumbag of a swordsman Yan Zi Fei, Dick Wei's golden hammer swinging chieftan Jin Ba, Johnny Wang Lung Wei's Golden Lion, Miss Smiley, The Silver Leopard, the utterly witchy Golden Hairpin and Fu Sheng's pouty knife thrower. In the thick of such scum and villainy, comes the single coolest character Kwok Choi has ever played (to me anyway), the honorable weapons smith, Qiu Zi Yu. This blacksmith trades his smithing for a kung fu style. Qiu has retired from weapons-making because Yan Zi Fei was not a man of his word. Instead of repaying Qiu Zi Yu with his mastery of the lightness technique (body lifting), Yan nearly kills Qiu with the unique sword Qiu made for Yan.

In the present day, Mo Jun Feng comes to Qiu to ask Qiu to remake Mo's 7 daggers...into this mix comes Miss Smiley and The Deadly Whip (Chiang Sheng in a wonderfully nasty cameo. He really underplayed the possessive bastard in this and I appreciated seeing him invest a lot in so little screen time.) Miss Smiley makes a deal with Mo and soon, much to his regret, Qiu is dragged into reclaiming the Jade as an appeal from his constable friend (Ku Feng) and Master Nan himself.

Along the way, Yan Zi Fei begs Qiu for help, claiming he's changed his ways. Oh, c'mon, Qiu, that's Lu Feng. You never trust Lu Feng. And so in a world full of criminals, trust is the one thing everyone seems to forget to think about including the most decent character Qiu himself.

This film is full of double and perhaps even triple crosses. It's an utter delight seeing how almost every character tries to pull the wool over the eyes of others, and yet, they all seem to trust each other despite the multitude of awful reputations.

I am particularly impressed with Johnny Wang Lung Wei's turn as Golden Lion. He was so sneaky and yet laid out everything in plain sight. Dick Wei was awesome in his way too short cameo as the arrogant, hammer swinging Jin Ba (and what a great make up too.) I liked all of the women here (everyone was a different shade of witch except for Kara Hui. Was she really just 17-18 when they shot this?) Lo Meng was wonderful and Kwok Choi is just brilliant. I love, love, love the very short sequences of Qiu mastering several kung fu techniques, and I still think this character's backstory would make an amazing movie. He's simply one of the most interesting and multi-faceted, yet flawed characters Kwok Choi has played. This should be pretty obvious, but something which just came to me, given Kwok Choi's many skills across a variety of martial disciplines, this character is almost a love letter to his many martial talents. I really care about this character and so I hate it when Qiu... well... it's a Chang Cheh film folks.

As I came from a background steeped in spaghetti westerns, I immediately fell in love with this film and it's many swarmy characters. It remains one of my most favorite Chang Cheh films and I still find so much to enjoy here. Even characters who don't have much screen time feel fleshed out to me and the story is very satisfying.

On the kung fu end, this really is more like a western (some great knife fights) until we get to Qiu's showdown with... not saying.

**Life of Ninja, A (Taiwan, 1983: Lee Tso-Nam)** - I'm not sure what happened between Tommy Lee and Lee Tso-Nam, because they seemed to work together a lot during the late 70s, but by the early 80s, Peng Kong had become Lee Tso-Nam's go-to guy. Obviously, this wasn't a problem, since the man had quite a bit of talent.

This film is a trashy little ninjasploitation flick about a sleazy businessman who's marked for death by the Iga ninja clan. Nobody likes the bastard, least of all his alcoholic wife and his sister-in-law, who's also his business rival. Said sister-in-law (Elsa Yeung) is also a martial arts aficionado and has recently started dating a kendo/bujutsu master

named Chow (Chen Kuan Tai). When it becomes apparent that ninja are killing everybody around the businessman, and that the sister-in-law is also on the hit list, Chow becomes the businessman's bodyguard to ferret out the killers (shades of Erik Von Lustbader's first ninja novel).

As far as I'm concerned, a ninja movie must be judged on two fronts: the quality of the martial arts and the creativity of the ninja tricks. With regards to the latter, we get quite a few. Poisoned icicle daggers, ninja hypnosis, deadly ninja sex, wire-assisted ninja jumps, explosives, and more punctuate the action. I must point out that the film's dialogue mainly consists of Chen Kuan-Tai telling everyone that it doesn't matter how many guns and bodyguards you have, the ninja will always prevail in the end.

Peng Kong's action is occasionally inspired, although sometimes a little silly. A drawn-out fight between Chen Kuan-Tai and a super-powerful ninja (played by a professional wrestler) doesn't work for me, but a previous scene in which he kills a bunch of ninja with a pair of tonfa does. The finale has Chen hacking a bunch of shinobi down with a katana, followed by a long fight between Chen and Yasuaki Kurata. The lighting is off during the katana portion of their fight, making it hard to see. The last bit, with Kurata adopting an eccentric monkey/cat style while Chen goes into bad-a\*\* mode is a highlight. I regret that the resident kunoichi didn't get to fight more, though. Fun at times, but it's no *Heroes of the East* or *Ninja in the Dragon's Den*.

**Lion vs. Lion (Hong Kong, 1981: Tyrone Hsu Hsia)** - The first half of this Shaw comedy is pretty excruciating, with endless scenes of comedy relief (relief from what?) and yet another excuse for me to be mystified by the fact that Wang Yu (the comic star, not Jimmy) was a big star at the time, as he's really dreadful. Lo Meng does provide some great kung fu though, and when the plot actually arrives nearly an hour into the picture, things improve. The titular Lion dance occurs part way through the film, and features blatant cheating from our "heroes". The dance itself is very impressive. Later, a great fight between Wang Lung Wei and Chin Yuet Sang proves a highlight and shows what this picture SHOULD have been. The finale is a bizarre mix of half-assed Chang Cheh style heroics and half-assed jiangshi horror, which kinda sums up the film as a whole: half assed.

**Little Hero (Taiwan, 1978: Chan Hung-Man)** - One would think that a film with Lion Men, Elephant Men, a whip wielding villainess, flying villains behind very cool iron masks, men hidden in giant attacking golf balls, a malicious dwarf, a hideaway in a cave tastefully decorated with skulls and Polly Shang Kwan would have been a lot more fun than this is. This movie that feels to have been inspired by old Flash Gordon films as much as anything is unfortunately lacking in one prime ingredient for a kung fu film – good fights!

With Polly Shang Kwan that seems unlikely, but the choreography is pretty weak for most of the film – but the main fault is in the camera work. There is an art to filming these sorts of films from the right angle so that it looks like contact is being made during the fights – but here it is fairly obvious that blows are missing their targets by a good margin and the object of those phantom blows falling backwards as if hit by a truck looks rather silly.

Polly still manages to look good with some snazzy acrobatic moves. I can't find out what year this film came out, but from her looks it appears to be near the end of Polly's career (she retired in 1980) and so I will guess 1978. Polly was in many ways the yin to Angela Mao's yang. Both were tremendous athletes, but while fans love Angela for the intensity and seriousness that she brought to her roles, fans love Polly because she was extremely light hearted – and as evidenced in this film not concerned about being in a goofy film or wearing silly outfits. She always looks to be having the time of her life.

The film seems to be centering around a group of villains searching for The Phoenix Sword and they send their minions – the before mentioned dwarf, Tiger Men and Elephant men after it. Only Polly and her kung fu stands in their way. Of course she deals with mere humans quite easily but when attacked by two wonderfully tacky rubber octopuses on land it may be a different matter! Definitely this is the highlight (or lowlight depending on your point of view!) of the movie as the octopuses seem to be shooting their repulsive rubber babies at Polly. In the end Polly reveals the villain behind the mask – and not really giving much away – it is kung fu legend Lo Lieh! Though the first half of the film (or first vcd) is slow going, it picks up considerably in the last 30 minutes.

**Little Hero of Shaolin Temple (Taiwan, 1984: Tang Chen Dah)** - aka **Shaolin Youth Posse; Red Dragon of Shaolin; Little Ninja Heroes** -...The last prince of the Ming Dynasty is being hunted by the now-in-power Chings. We know this, because the mother/nursemaid/whoever of said prince is telling this to the Master of the Shaolin Temple as she pleads for him to hide the prince in the temple. She also yanks off the prince's show to show bright red mole on the sole of his foot. THIS IS IMPORTANT.



And apparently the Chings suspect that, because an emissary from the emperor arrives, telling them that the monks have all been called to Mount Wu Tai, to join the emperor in basking in the wisdom of the scriptures (i.e., where he can keep an eye on them). The Master deduces that, if he refuses, it will give the Chings an excuse to attack them, so he leaves the fat bald Abbott and all of the juvenile monks (which look to be roughly two hundred boys between nine and seventeen) behind, and out they troop the next day.

Naturally, this is great for the youngsters, because it's hard for the abbott to be everywhere at once. Immediately, a half-dozen mini-monks sneak into the wine cellar to practice "drunken boxing." No, really; one kid gets some wine, and proceeds to give an exhibit of prowess for five minutes which looks like a cross between a martial arts routine and ballet. Yes, it gets very old, but not as old as the one kid (like I caught names for any of them) who stutters constantly and gets everyone else in trouble. I don't know if he was as odious in the original, but as dubbed by somebody who thinks that "Shaggy with a stutter" is wonderful characterization, you just want to put a metal bucket on his head and beat it with a wooden spoon.

In fact, this is as good a place as any for an impassioned aside: WHERE THE HELL DO THEY GET THESE DUBBERS? All of the voices sound like vocal talent wanna-be's who were rejected by Saturday morning TV for sounding "too cartoony." Plus, I more than half suspect that there were a total of four or five dubbers, tops, resulting in excessively "characterized" voices for everyone so we can tell them apart. It doesn't work, thanks to the fact that the dubbers can't keep any given character's voice straight from scene to scene. Couple that with the fact that all these shaven-headed Asian youths in identical blue PJ's look an awful lot alike (and the crummy original film-stock and 2nd-generation dub don't help), and I had a devil of a time trying to keep any of the kids straight. Except the stutterer. Him, I had no trouble identifying.

So then, when the Abbott catches the kids, they all immediately tattle on the stutterer, whose idea it was to do the "authentic" drunken boxing. But for some reason, the Abbott gives everyone else a punishment and lets Stutterer be their taskmaster (I guess he hates snitches or something), said punishments being something along the lines of a Peking Opera exhibition: touching hands and feet to the ground while bending over backwards,, having other youths do handstands on the bent-over-backwards stomachs, etc.

All of this is in good fun, I suppose, though not terribly interesting. And I guess that director Tong felt the same way, because the mood immediately changes as the kids find one of their number floating face-down in the pond. The fun and games are now over.

At bedtime, Stutterer gets into a fight with an older boy about the disposition of the deceased's possessions; another older boy takes Stutterer's part, and the two kids start kung fu fighting around the bedchamber -- until one of them accidentally unrolls a sleeping mat to discover yet another young corpse.

From that point, the Abbott orders the boys to pair off and patrol the ground, with alarm whistles around their necks. Unfortunately, one of the boys on patrol stops to take off his shoes, and a hidden assassin sees -- a red dot on his foot! Slash slash, both boys are added to the casualty pile.

Who is behind all of this? Why, it's the evil... uh... I know she's not the Empress or the Queen, so let's just call her the Ching Princess. The assassin reports back to her that he has killed the Ming prince, but other assassins argue: I drowned him in the pool! No, I killed him in the bedchamber! Yup, they put it together: All of the young monks have red dots on their feet to protect the prince.

Another assassin goes in the next night, but this time the boys capture him, and the Abbott lays some Fat Guy Fu on him until he confesses his mission -- only to end up at the receiving end of a thrown dagger from yet another assassin. The Abbott also takes one in the chest, and it's only the padding of his layers of fat that allows him to survive long enough to call the monks together and pass the Abbottship on to young PuAn (and I only know his name thanks to the back of the box). I'm not sure what PuAn did to be the one selected, but I do know that, now that he's wearing the orange Abbott robes instead of the blue Kung Fu Cadet uniform, I now have a second character I can identify. Whee.

The Ching princess's envoy meets with the new Abbott, thinking he can push over these little kids. The little kids, however, are well stocked with bows and arrows, and the princess opts for Plan B: To send all of her assassins in at once in a frontal attack.

In other words, it's time for some Big-Ass Fu Fighting, boys and girls. There are about eight assassins (I never got the chance to count them), including one who uses a tai-chi sword on a bungee cord, and an effeminate one who prefers to kill little boys by biting open their necks. And there's a lot of said neck-biting, and chest-slicing, and stomach-stabbing, and back-breaking, and all manner of carnage from here on out. The young monks may be pretty good at that whole kung fu jazz (I know that any of them could lay me out on my ass without breaking a sweat -- except Stutterer, I refuse to admit that he'd beat me), but these other guys are professionals. I daresay that this scene contains more gory children's deaths than you've ever seen before. It's a very strange sensation to realize that you're looking directly into the gulf of cross-cultural differences, and a very visceral example it is. (I had

originally picked this up on Yahoo! Auctions with some other movies, and gave it to my kids for Christmas; and yes, this is the point at which I stopped the tape and explained that I didn't think a six-year-old needed to see so much bloody death all at once. I got no argument from the six-year-old.)

So. After a few dozen adolescent bodies are strewn around, the attack... um... stops. (Union rules? Tea time? I dunno.) Abbott PuAn regroups his boys and decides that two need to go to Mount Wu Tai to let the older monks know what's going on. His two volunteers race through the woods, encountering traps and the assassins again; one boy sacrifices himself so that the other can get away with the message. (And there might have been some good fu fighting in here, but it was such a murky day-for-night that I couldn't see much of anything.)

Next morning, another big assassin attack, a whole much more bloody corpses. The Abbott orders a retreat out the back to the mountains, and as the boys retreat through the stone garden at the back of the temple...

[Note: What I'm about to describe may sound like I somehow stopped the tape and accidentally put in an entirely different kung fu movie. My wife was watching this with me, and can attest that the following events did indeed take place in the same movie.]

...The assassin with the bungee sword misses and pokes a hole in a rock. White smoke starts hissing out, and the young Abbott gets some kind of revelatory voice-over that tells him that if he has no plan of attack, he's doomed to failure. (He could have been remembering something told him by the former Abbott, but it sure looked like an Obi-Wan Kenobi moment to me.) Then the smoke changes to yellow, then to black, and then -- well, then the stone explodes and out leaps a zombie monk in a yellow robe, who engages in much wirework and hands the assassins their asses.

Huh?

Exactly. He's a growling, snarling, tangle-haired old monk in a yellow robe who looks pretty dead to me, and he does flying leaps and fights the assassins until they leave. Then he positions himself cross-legged on the front walk of the temple to guard the gate.

And while you're still trying to wrap your mind around that one, the surviving messenger boy on his way to Wu Tai is found in the woods by a wandering wood nymph. Or something. She's a girl maybe on the cusp of puberty, dressed like she should be hanging out with Boy and Cheeta, and she patches his wounds with a mudpie and accompanies him on his way. (I gotta stop watching these movies late at night. By the next morning, I can't tell what was in the movie and what was a movie-inspired dream. But this part was right there in my notes, so it must have been in the movie.)

Next day, the assassins show up with the envoy to discover the the yellow monk is now nothing more than a cross-legged skeleton (with beard and eyebrows comically stuck to the skull). So in they come to attack again, expecting another rout...

... Only to discover that PuAn has put his Obi-Wan wisdom to good use. The boys aren't just prepared; they're choreographed! The next ten minutes are an advertisement for the inclusion of Synchronized Fu as an Olympic sport, as the kids wipe the floor with the assassins (dispatching a couple quite gorily in the process).

But no, it's not the end of the movie yet. Because the Ching princess still has one trick up her sleeve: The "Japanese unit" they've been maintaining for, you know, special occasions. Japanese unit? But that would mean -- ninjas! Ninjas in a movie with "Ninja" in the title! What'll they think of next? (Of course, these ninjas aren't little, nor are they heroes, but what the hey.) Said ninjas appear before the princess in the requisite fashions -- backflipping, springing out of the water, appearing in a puff of smoke -- and get their marching orders.

And yes, these ninjas proceed to use all of those reality-defying tricks we've come to expect (but not forgive) as they attack the temple that night. More smoke poofs, plus grappling hooks and other ninja goodies, and they manage to knock the temple contingent down to about twenty kids.

In the morning, the princess herself comes with her retinue and the ninjas to accept the temple's surrender. The Abbott's plan, instead, is to walk out to her with his waist wrapped with -- dynamite! (No, not dynamite; that would be an anachronism. Plus, these tubes are tan, and everyone knows that dynamite in movies has to be in red tubes, right? And the Chinese were masters of gunpowder and fireworks, so we'll just say that these are really really explosive Roman Candles.) But Stutterer insists that they can't lose another Abbott -- so he grabs a stick of dyna-- er, a Roman Candle from the Abbott's belt, lights it on a handy torch, and runs out and grabs ahold of a ninja. BOOM. Yup, Stutterer finally did something worthwhile. I'm not sure that it compensates for his continual presence as Odious Comic Relief through the rest of the movie, but it's something.

And then another monk grabs two sticks and runs out and takes out two more ninjas. And three more suicide runs follow. And suddenly there are no ninjas left -- and the princess is their prisoner.

The Princess's brother shows up to storm the temple for her release then, but who should come at just that very moment? Why, all the older Shaolin monks, led by the messenger and the wood nymph. And while the Ching prince was fine with taking out the few remaining children, he's not got the balls to take on the fully-grown monks. So the old Master negotiates a peace for the princess's release, and everything ends copacetic. (And here's the kicker: The Ming prince wasn't even on the premises! He left the same time that the monks went to Wu Tai! Ha!)

Well.

Probably the biggest surprise to be found here is the realization that, no, the Western unwritten rule of not killing children on-screen holds no sway here. That's really not a complete surprise if you've seen other Hong Kong films like *The Heroic Trio*, but that movie made it a necessary part of the story, and a supremely sad occurrence. Whereas we're used to seeing bodies fly left and right in a chop-socky fu flick; we're just not used to them being too young to shave.

The second biggest surprise is, of course, the zombie monk. Remember I made mention earlier of the director possibly being bored when he changed the mood of the picture? That goes a zillion times for Ol' Stinky. While it's not exactly a storyline change on the level of *Rat Pink a Boo Boo*, it certainly does seem like an attempt to keep the crew interested. Not that I'm complaining; by that point of the movie, I was grateful for something to jar me to full awareness.

I still haven't quite figured out the wood nymph, but you know what? I'm not going to overtax my neurons on that one, if it's okay with you.

**Little Mad Guy (Hong Kong, 1980: Wong Sing-Loy) - aka Rage of the Master** - Stay with me for a moment while I set the stage. It must have been 1979 or so. I was eight years old, sitting in the living room of our house wrapped in a ragged gold colored blanket to protect me from the biting winter air that seemed to possess total disregard for the existence of our windows.

I was gearing up for my Saturday afternoon ritual. Having survived the onslaught of lame-ass Snorks and Uni the Unicorn on *Dungeons and Dragons*, it was time for WDRB-TV 41's Saturday Monster Matinee, my weekly dose of towering monsters kicking over Japanese landmarks. Many were the days I had thrilled to the likes of Mothra, Rodan, Godzilla, and the sprinting Gargantuas -- the only giant monsters I know of that ever just plain hauled ass across the landscape.

That day they showed *Godzilla Versus Monster Zero*, which always pleased me (and still does). But after the film, the baritone voice of the announcer came on and told me I had better stay tuned for TV-41's new "Martial Arts Matinee." Well, I knew enough about the martial arts to know this was something I wanted in on. The film was *Little Mad Guy*, my first kungfu film, and in more ways than one, it changed my life.

From that day on, kungfu films joined Japanese science fiction in my growing list of obsessions. These guys who could learn to fight from looking at a lake or could jump over walls or out of ponds and be completely dry and make that amazing splash where the water starts up in the air and splashes back down into the form of a placid surface. These guys were amazing, and before too long, while everyone else was fighting over who got to play Han Solo at school, I was satisfied being the Lizard Venom. I mean shit, that guy could walk up walls. Let's see Han Solo pull that off.

So *Little Mad Guy* has a special place in my heart and will always be one of my most treasured films. I was overjoyed the day I found it on video, and at the same time a bit apprehensive. What if youthful enthusiasm had colored the memory for me? What if it sucked? What if it was like *Game of Death*, which was utter garbage when I rewatched years after having first seen it.

But then I remembered thinking *Game of Death* was utter trash the first time I saw it anyway, so I abandoned my trepidation, invited some friends over, and was pleased to discover that *Little Mad Guy* had actually gotten better with age, much like a fine wine, William Shatner's mental state, or Pam Grier.

*Little Mad Guy* is the story of one of the fifteen million guys in China named either Fatty or Porky. Fatty wants to make a name for himself as a hero, but he's just not very good at kungfu. When he attempts to capture a vicious murderer and gets his ass beat, he is forced to seek training from an aging marshal who makes Fatty learn kungfu from toads. Yep. That's some good shit right there, and you get lines like "Damnit, Fatty! Why can't you catch those damn snakes? It's so damn easy!"

It's an action packed kungfu comedy with some great fight choreography. Fatty may be a little tubby fella, but man alive, can he ever move! This movie is every bit as much wacky fun as my personal favorite of all old school kungfu

comedies, *Half a Loaf of Kungfu*, but the fights are much faster and better choreographed as such things progressed quite a lot from 1976 to 1979.

Few things please me more than a film like *Little Mad Guy*. Watching it immediately after *Godzilla Versus Monster Zero* was a mind-blowing experience that shaped my interests for the rest of my life, and y'know, when the moon is full and the wolves are howling, I like to sit down with some friends, cook up a batch of honey glazed chicken or some tacos, and watch the two films back to back again. It's an energizing, thoroughly enjoyable experience that brings back all sorts of memories and puts me in "my special place."

The best way I can summarize the experience: "Solid!"

**Little Superman (Hong Kong, 1974: Ng See-Yuen) - aka Fist of Vengeance; Bruce, D-Day in Macau** - Bruce Liang takes on Japanese spies in wartime Hong Kong in a race to intercept some secret plans hidden in a musical instrument. Made in 1974 the action isn't stylised as later films but Bruce Liang's superfast kicks more than make up for it.

Ng See Yuen paces the story well keeping the star away from the action in the first half allowing audience anticipation to build. When Liang finally lets loose he burns up the screen with devastatingly fast kicks. It's interesting to see an early performance from Meng Hoi as a young kid, displaying his natural acrobatic ability.

The plot is pretty standard fare but perfectly adequate, injecting comedy or intrigue at the right moments to maintain interest. It all builds up to a totally furious showdown between Liang and the main villain. It's hardhitting stuff that carries an intensity quite distinct from the rest of the film.

**Living Sword (Hong Kong, 1971: Wong Ping)** - In an official duel, the hero ( Paul Chang Chung ) kills a young man (Charlie Chin) in order to win the prize. When he returns home, he finds his wife with another man and he kills them both. His mother asks him to confess his crime and he is put in jail, but there, he learns that his mother is dead, so, he escapes in order to revenge her death.

He is hurt by his enemies and takes shelter in a temple, where a young nun ( Chen Man Ling ) rescues him. After recovering, he falls for the nun, but she doesn't want him.

Chang Chung's enemies return to the temple after discovering that he is there and they put the fire in the temple and kill the nuns. Chang Chung and Chen Man Ling can escape, but their enemies chase them.

Later on, Chang Chung discovers that Chen Man Ling was Charlie Chin's fiancée and they fight, but they stop fighting each other and join forces when their pursuers arrive in order to kill them and...see the movie for the end !! A good Cathay's movie, with good fights, even if Chan Man Ling fights only at the end.

**Lizard, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chor Yuan)** - In the original trailer of this 1972 Shaw Brothers production, the fact gets triumphantly heralded re that which has a masked do-gooder as its center featuring then teen idol Connie Chan Po-Chu's first movie appearance in two years. Unfortunately for that charismatic lady's fans (who, post her maiden sighting of this leading actress by way of the Hong Kong Film Archive's screening of "She's So Brave" in the summer of 2002, might be said to include this reviewer), this Celestial Pictures re-release also ended up being the final film of a still much adored individual who decided to retire from acting at the grand old age of twenty five years.

Although the original trailer additionally makes it seem like Connie Chan's Xiao Ju character could be the generally entertaining offering's "rob from the rich (and often foreign) to give to the (usually Chinese) poor" principal personality, it soon becomes clear enough that -- for all of her possessing fairly formidable martial arts abilities (and being involved in all three of this effort's three main set pieces) -- she is but THE LIZARD's primary female admirer and love interest. Something else that might be best for people to realize in advance is that at least one, maybe two, of this period action work's other cast members also have more screen time than its first billed actress; and that both the Everyman looking -- and sometimes representing -- Yueh Hua and the archetypally villainous Lo Lieh turn out to be good dramatic plus action foils for each other.

As I see it, one of the problems with filmic offerings that have a masked personality as its central figure is how to make it seem plausible for those who know the character when (s)he's unmasked to be patently unable to

recognize the person even when (s)he is in a not all that heavily disguised form. The makers of THE LIZARD look to have, at least initially, sought to account for how this could be in their picture by suggesting that the offering's titular character hardly ever gets seen by anyone, including the local hero's deserving victims as well as the area constabulary (who come across as almost entirely composed of bumbling and/or corrupt personnel). Consequently, even this individual's specific gender, never mind general physical build, appeared to be a mystery to the majority of the populace -- one which, BTW, includes characters played by a guest-starring Wu Ma and Lydia Shum -- for a time.

Another way which this relatively linearly structured effort's makers sought to obscure the identity of the titular personality from friends plus admirers as well as foe is by providing the movie's protagonist with an unassuming seeming everyday personality (that prompted a chum to (prematurely) proclaim to the individual concerned that "I'm a dinosaur if you're THE LIZARD"!)). At the same time, even those have seen this offering's likeable leading man in just a handful of Celestial re-releases -- like myself -- may well have little difficulty realizing, and post getting a few choice glimpses of his half-observed face early on in the movie, that Yueh Hua it was whose Cheng Long Ge (AKA Brother Dumb!) character had chosen to lead a risky Robin Hood or Iron Monkey type double life.

In any event, at the stage in that which probably ought to be looked upon as only a minor Chor Yuen helmed cum scripted effort whereby Lo Lieh's crooked Chief Investigating Officer Chen Can sought to trap, capture and get THE LIZARD out of his hair once and for all, the more covert portion of idealistic hero's identity already was known by his feisty lady love. After the no longer always stuttering Mr. Cheng gets put behind bars, Xiao Ju reveals his secret to her actually not as clever as he thinks he is grandfather (Mr. Yo, AKA Chin Biao Tien) and another friend cum junior member of the much criticized local constabulary as a prelude to enlisting their assistance in springing him out of jail.

Initially, this triumvirate's plans -- one which involves the spiriting away of a treasured item from the Japanese consul's residence to the gambling den operated by Chen Can's main lackey (a sleazy individual known as Mr. King who also holds the official position of translator in a society that is, pointedly(?), shown to not be solely made up of ethnic Chinese) -- looked to have been carried out without any hitches. As the subsequently freed Mr. Cheng quickly suspected though, further complications and problems would ensue from it. Consequently, THE LIZARD's viewers get treated to at least one more one-on-one confrontation between Yueh Hua and Lo Lieh's characters plus an appropriately climactic battle in a picturesque setting involving the movie's key supporting as well as main personalities.

**Long Road To Gallantry (Hong Kong, 1984: Lung Yi-Sheng)** - *Long Road To Gallantry* would be the second of the only two films veteran choreographer Lung Yi-Sheng would take on full directorial, writing, and choreography duties, and if both efforts only show one thing, it's that this wasn't a man who did things by halves. Made a year after his first effort, *Demon Of The Lute*, *Long Road To Gallantry* takes a traditional Shaw Brothers swordplay saga and elevates it to the next level. Many familiar faces return from his first film, most notably the ever stunning Kara Hui and Jason Pai Piao, and they are also joined by a couple of newcomers who would go on to make a name for themselves in the Hong Kong movie industry.

First up is Ho Chia-Chin, who became more well known in the west under the name of Kenny Ho. This was his debut movie as the main star, and he lights up the screen with a great performance matched with a searing intensity during his fight scenes, of which there are thankfully many. After watching this film it's hard to believe he didn't go onto much bigger things, he joined Jackie Chan's stunt team for a few years, gaining bit roles in the Chan classics *Project A Part II* and *Police Story 2*, but then mostly worked in television, before attempting to be launched as a new action hero in Yuen Wo-Ping's 1995 take on *Under Siege*, *Red Wolf*, which wasn't the success it was planned to be.

Secondly, the film can boast Rosamund Kwan in her first period role. After starring in *Long Road To Gallantry* Kwan's career went from strength to strength, starring most memorably to martial arts fans as Aunt Yee in Jet Li's *Once Upon A Time In China* series, and she is still active in roles today. Interestingly, both her and Kenny Ho would share the screen again 3 years after this film in *Project A Part II*, and even then it was Kwan who had the much bigger role, sharing leading lady status with Maggie Cheung.

The story of the film itself centres on a long standing family feud between two rival factions, the brilliantly named Thunder Gang led by the Leng family, and the Dragon Sect led by the Li family. Both parties have a manual which holds the secret to mastering the Jiu Xuan Force, which can ultimately grant the practitioner invincibility. The Thunder Gang leader Leng Tian Lei, played with gusto by Lung Tien Hsiang, has the manual which explains how to practice the Jiu Xuan Force, and the previous leader of the Dragon Sect, Chang Tian Yi, played by Chen Kuan Tai, has the manual which provides the antidote to anyone who's been hit with the Force.

Kenny Ho's character, Du Meng Fei, walks into the middle of this feud after rescuing Rosamund Kwan's character, Mu Wan Er, who is part of the Dragon Sect, from a group of Thunder Gang assailants. It turns out that Leng Tian Lei had a newborn daughter who was taken from him 20 years ago, after a failed attack to steal the manuals from the Dragon Sect was foiled by Chang Tian Yi, leading to his wife's death and his daughter being left behind, to be raised by Tian Yi under the protection and values of the righteous Dragon Sect. Tian Lei has been trying to capture all the girls who are part of the Dragon Sect so that he can try to identify which one is his offspring. Kwan ultimately turns out to be the long lost daughter, leading to split loyalties and questioned identities.

To complicate matters further, Kara Hui arrives on the scene playing a character named Li Sai Nan, who before it is revealed that Kwan is the daughter of Tian Lei is pretending to be the daughter herself, so that she can get close enough to Tian Lei to kill him. It's revealed that she is in fact one of the last surviving members of the Li family, and she has been attempting to assassinate Tian Lei under the guidance of her uncle, played by Jason Pai Piao who has been living as a recluse for the past 20 years in an elaborate cave.

Along the way a love triangle develops between Kenny Ho, Rosamund Kwan, & Kara Hui, several characters' loyalties are swayed back and forth, a couple of helpless goldfish fall victim to the Jiu Xuan Force, and everything culminates in an epic battle as Leng Tian Lei attempts to wipe out the Dragon Sect and seize the ultimate power for himself.

The plot may sound complex, however on film it works perfectly, and is certainly no more difficult to follow than any of Chor Yuen's adaptations of Gu Long's wuxia novels. Director Lung Yi-Sheng's choreography skills are really put to the fore in this film, his style has a certain quirkiness to it, which certainly goes hand in hand with many of the films he has worked on as an action director as well, among them the crazy kung-fu classics *Buddha's Palm* & *Portrait In Crystal*.

Kenny Ho has many scenes where he ploughs his way through a small army of attackers, and although in some scenes the action is slightly undercranked, in others they are clearly run at normal speed, and these have an energetic pace to them which is unusual for many Shaw Brothers movies. Adding further to this feel is the way Ho remains unarmed for the majority of the film, taking on all his attackers with fists and feet with a real look of determination on his face is a pleasure to watch, and is probably also a sign of the trend kung-fu cinema was heading to at the time, leaning more towards hand to hand combat than the weapon orientated fight fests of the past.

Nobody is neglected on the action front though, with all the main players getting a chance to throw their weight around. Kara Hui in particular looks at the peak of her powers, owning every scene she is in with her grace and agility. If anything the only downside of having such a feisty female in the cast who had trained under the legendary Lau Kar Leung, is that when it comes to Rosamund Kwan to get involved in a fight scene, the constant change of camera angle to a long range shot amongst the branches only highlights the fact she is being doubled more than it would normally.

The highlight fight of the film in my opinion though is actually mid-way through, on storming into the Dragon Sect's headquarters to try and seize the other manual, Lung Tien Hsiang is suddenly confronted by Chen Kuan Tai, who literally drops in straight onto the screen! The two explode into a battle of fists, feet, and crazy wire-work in a brilliantly staged duel. I have to say as well, having now watched both *Demon Of The Lute* and *Long Road To Gallantry*, I am convinced that director Ling Yi-Sheng should be credited as the original creator of 'bullet-time', the effect that the Wachowski brothers used in the ground-breaking Matrix movies.

He uses a technique, quite how I've yet to figure out, where when the two fighters take to the air to battle it out, the camera spins around them from the ground capturing every movement from a 360 angle, it's a great shot to see, which he has used in both films he's directed. Although I'm sure it's debatable if the Wachowski brothers had actually seen these films or not, the scenes look incredible to watch, and had I viewed Neo & Agent Smith colliding with each other in the subway station guns ablaze first, I'm pretty sure I would swear they must have got their inspiration from these movies!

Another unusual thing Yi-Sheng uses for a Hong Kong period movie of the time, is that he sets the fight scenes to music. This actually works incredibly well, with the music helping to create the mood of the fight, not something you would normally see in your average Shaw Brothers kung-fu flick. The music played during the brawl between Chen Kuan Tai & Lung Tien Hsiang is particularly effective, the upbeat pace of it matching the intensity of the fight, and also during a flashback sequence to when Tien Hsiang is describing how he lost his wife, even though the fight on-screen is fast moving and dynamic, the music stays sober and melancholy, capturing the mood of the memory perfectly and adding a rarely felt depth to the duel.

There is the perfect mix of traditional Chinese instruments and the more modern synthesiser driven tracks in use, in particular the plodding synthesiser effect used whenever Tien Hsiang unleashes the Jiu Xuan Force technique is the perfect compliment to the crazed forms he puts on display. When you combine all of these factors together along with the high production values, Long Road To Gallantry is essential viewing for anyone who considers themselves a fan of martial arts madness.

**Loot, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Eric Tsang)** - From the opening scene, the film delivers some mindblowing choreography as Tsui Siu Keung and Alan Hsu trade blows in sequence that sets an extremely high standard. It's a standard that isn't dropped throughout and culminates in what must be one of the best fight scenes featured in a kung fu movie. In fact I'd say that this has gone straight into my top 10 films of all times.

When a group of people each receive the calling card of a notorious assassin, they call in David Chiang to be their bodyguard. As the group includes Phillip Kao Fei and Kwan Yung Moon it's a bit of a surprise that they need someone to protect them but there are dark secrets and hidden agendas to be uncovered and its quite clear that David isn't being told the whole story.

This early directorial effort from Eric Tsang makes one wish that he had more of kung fu movies instead of just the 2. Although the follow up, 'The Challenger', nearly matches the heights reached here, 'The Loot' just wins by a nats breath. Everything about this film works; the intrigue, the plot, the comedy (underplayed and quite subtle) and of course the fantastic action.

What impresses is the length of the individual takes featuring numerous highly complex moves executed at fast pace without any sign of under-cranking. Many regard David Chiang with caution when it comes to traditional kung fu movies but here he proves to be more than capable of handling the intricate sequences, despite the fact that he is not a martial artist. Co-stars Kwan Yung Moon, Phillip Kao, Lily Li and Tsui Siu Keung are quite simply dazzling combining to produce some of the most jaw-dropping fights ever witnessed in a kung fu film. Although this is not the most accessible film to find, every kung fu fan should track this down.

**Lost Kung Fu Secrets, The (Taiwan, 1980: Joe Law)** - I love it when movie titles bring their own punchlines with them. For this one, I have to ask: Would anyone have cared if these kung fu secrets had stayed lost?

One of the reasons I went out of my way to track this one down is because of a fairly unique plot point, one which probably also accounts for the fact that this one was never previously released stateside [okay, I found out later that it was -- so sue me]: The evil warlord making his nefarious plans against the Ching Dynasty uses Christianity as a weapon. In fact, that's the first thing you learn as the movie opens: "Mr. Badass Warlord uses Christianity as a defense and a means of recruiting soldiers to his cause." And there he is, his dias overshadowed by a huge red cross (which is pretty obviously two strips of red cloth hurriedly pinned perpendicular to each other -- this is a typically impoverished Taiwanese production, after all).

Here, I thought, would be an occasion for some interesting plot points: Does Christianity become a subversive movement? Do we get women and children happily acting as martyrs for the warlord, treating his offensive against the Dynasty as a holy cause? Is there any backlash against "real" Christians, or those who aren't associated with the warlord's vendetta?

Well, if ever those questions are to be answered, they'll have to be answered in some other movie. Because aside from that one image, and the use of the word "Christian" twice in passing, that entire interesting plot element is completely absent. So is just about any other interesting plot element, for that matter.

On with the story, then: We see the Christian troops of the warlord (I'll be avoiding proper names most of the time, thanks to my inability to accurately record all of the Chinese names I hear) getting their asses handed to them by the Ching Commander (hereinafter known as the Commander), who exults in their victory with his right-hand man, Captain Te, who used to be on the warlord's team but switched sides. Or did he?

Apparently not, as he sneaks out of their victory banquet to meet with a Christian spy dressed as a bum and relay the Commander's plans to the warlord. But the spy is soon thereafter confronted by -- Cha Chiang! (That's Chiang Da Wei, or "David Chiang" to you and me.) A young kung fu master dressed in immaculate white, Chiang also came

over from the warlord's camp, and has had his suspicions of Captain Te all along; this meeting with the spy clinches it, so he fights the spy and his cronies for several minutes in order to bring the spy in alive -- but it all comes to naught, as a mysterious dart kills the spy to keep him silent.

Chiang brings the body before the Commander with accusations against Captain Te, but the Commander laughs the allegations off and tells Chiang not to be so hotheaded. Stymied, Chiang then goes to the Commander's wife and daughter (the latter is always referred to as "the princess," so I'm not sure exactly what the Commander is, in addition to being, you know, a commander). Seems that the Commander and family have been invited to Captain Te's camp, and Chiang thinks that's a not-so-much good idea. Unable to persuade the Commander either directly or through the womenfolk, he instead volunteers his services as a constant bodyguard to the wimmens.

Along the way, naturally, Chiang and Captain Te have words about loyalty and traitorousness (traitorosity?), with one of these "The next time I see you, it'll be to the death!" ultimatums. (Ultimata?)

Chiang's suspicions prove well-founded, because once in Te's camp, Te has the Commander's retinue dispersed among his own men, making them very easy to pick off and kill. Chiang tries mightily to defend the princess (helped by the fact that she is herself a kung fu badass) and rescue the Commander from Te's tent, but along the way the princess gets captured (and her mother dies by her own hand, so as not to slow her daughter's escape down). Chiang then switches clothes with the Commander and splits up with him to go rescue the princess. Boy, no matter what he does, he can't watch 'em both at the same time, can he? So he and the princess end up trekking toward a Ching stronghold, while the Commander wanders the countryside and gets himself captured.

Whatever flimsy excuse we've had for a plot takes a dirt nap right about here, because from this point until the end, it's just a long string of kung fu fights, as Chiang and the princess are continually discovered by, ambushed by, and beset upon by Te's and the warlord's fighters. First it's poisoned noodles in a restaurant, then it's a ferryboat full of conspirators (who take their time attacking, mainly so we can thrill along to the becalmed sailing action, apparently), then three women doing their laundry on the riverbank who turn out to have deadly baskets, an ambush in a canyon with big styrofoam rocks falling in neverending cascades (fellas, I know filmstock's expensive in Taiwan, but when your big rock hits a character and bounces without so much as throwing her off-balance, maybe it's time for another take), and five guys with big colorful flags that they use like spears. It gets comical after a while, like, "Hmm, look. People. Bet they're bad guys."

There's the merest hint of attraction between Chiang and the princess, but it's limited to some soulful yet reserved silent looks; fraternization across class boundaries would definitely be discouraged. Eventually, instead, he rescues the Commander from a low-rent prison cell and braves a number of other fighters, including the warlord's main general. Or maybe it's the warlord himself; I couldn't keep them straight, as they have similar facial hair and both like to wear red hoods that bear a disturbing resemblance to baby bonnets.

Eventually there's the inevitable showdown between Chiang and Captain Te (the latter wearing spiked armor), while simultaneously the princess fends off several goons who assault her with flaming catapult payloads. (This movie features practically every ungainly kung fu weapon short of the flying guillotine itself.) Thanks to the magic of intercutting, we get to watch both of those fights for a full ten minutes. Enthralling action? Actually, I was pinching myself to stay awake until the big yellow words "THE END" came up.

Maybe it's just that the fight choreography was so damned rhythmic. Hit, hit, punch, kick, block, kick, hit, chop, hit... There was a metronomic quality to it all that undermined any possible adrenaline rush to the big climactic fight and instead lulled me to sleep. that, and the fact that there had been nothing but fights like that for the last forty minutes, made this 92-minute feature seem sooooo long. Maybe that's the "secret" alluded to in the title. Or maybe I'm just reaching for some way to wrap up this review. In which case, I'll just cut my losses and stop here.

**Lost Swordship (Taiwan, 1977: Lee Chia) - aka Lost Samurai Sword** - The duo of Tien Peng and Pai Ying gave us some of the most delightfully mediocre, unimpressive, but rather enjoyable martial arts films of the 1970s. In this one, a samurai film in which there are no samurai (sort of like all those ninja films), a lot of people are looking for the magical "Fragrant Sword," because well hell, who wouldn't want a sword that smells really good?

The sword is being protected by Tien Peng, so an evil bishop kidnaps Tien's wife in order to make him talk. Since this is a kungfu film, he fights instead. After nearly being killed, Tien decides to sit in a cave for two years before looking for the sword himself.



There is a lot of betraying, running and jumping, and a "super special surprise" at the end that will shock you, probably because you only saw it coming from a mile away instead of ten. I won't spoil the excitement of the first ten minutes of the film (about how long it will take you to figure out who the mysterious bishop really is).

Thoroughly average kungfu fare. I didn't hate myself after watching it. In fact, I couldn't even remember that I had seen it, and I had to watch it again years later in order to remember anything at all about it. It really wasn't worth the effort, you know, but it was better than watching *A Man Called Tiger*.

**Lotus Camp (Hong Kong, 1969: Tu Kuang-Chi)** - Because of the lack of subtitles, it's difficult to fully understand all the plot of this movie, so I'll try my best to give a review as clear as possible, but if there is someone who watched this one and understand Mandarin language, don't hesitate to correct my review, please.

The story begins with Chen Man Ling who arrives in a house and discovers a lot of dead bodies. Then, she is attacked by Han Ying Chieh and some men and she defeats them. She meets Charlie Chin who explains her something and they both go to the jail of the town by night in order to let out an old man. There is an explanation between them and the old man finds that the man with Chen Man Ling isn't Charlie Chin but an imposter who wears a mask with Charlie Chin's face and the three of them go to a fortress where they meet the owner of the fortress. The fake Charlie Chin leads them to a secret crypt where they discover a glass coffin in which there is the body of the owner of the fortress. When they leave, the "dead" goes out of the coffin and a woman gives him something to swallow and gives him her orders.

Later, at night, the owner of the fortress is killed by his doppelganger and when she chases him, Chen Man Ling is kidnapped after she fainted. Then, Charlie Chin and the old man return in the crypt and the old man is killed by the doppelganger (or perhaps it is this one the real owner of the fortress?). Charlie Chin is captured and, as the killer threaten to kill Chen Man Ling, he agrees to be his man and at the same moment, two men come and save Chen Man Ling with the help of a friend of hers. Charlie Chin is lead by a woman cohort to another fortress where there is a masked man who they call Majesty and he is ordered to find Chen Man Ling.

After a lot of twists, imposters and revealed truths, the "Majesty" appears to be the first man who had taken Charlie Chin's face and he is punished. Sorry if my review isn't clear enough. It's a good movie and the fights are very good.

**Lust for Love of a Chinese Courtesan (Hong Kong, 1984: Chor Yuen)** - My interest was piqued recently when I found out that Asia the Invincible's concubine in *Swordsman II* was the ex-wife of Chow Yun Fat and that she, Candice Yu On-on, had appeared in a scattering of films in the eighties. I was able to track down this intriguing title and found to my surprise that even though it's not the type of film I would normally go out of my way to see, it was kind of a fun change.

Chor Yuen directed the film in 1984 for Shaw Brothers very near the end of their cinematic run (they were soon to move into television instead) and it has a slightly dated feel to it. Chor Yuen was a legendary and innovative director in the 1960's and this melodramatic lush quasi-softcore period film seems much more in tune for the 60's than in the 80's. By quasi-softcore, I mean that though there are a number of love making scenes – there is no nudity – and the love scenes are almost nostalgically innocent from our perspective – full of clenched fists, choir music from a heavenly synthesizer, ecstatic looks on the women's faces as if they had bought a new pair of shoes and lots of shots of flowers. I am not quite sure I got the significance of the flowers, but one scene that transposed a sword fight with two people making love and had the killing thrust coincide with an orgasm was corny but cute.

Candice runs a very high-class brothel in ancient China called Happy Valley and it is certainly full of happy customers as the women are beautiful and the service is perfect. Beneath Candice's beautiful and composed exterior lies the mind of a total merciless mercenary. She manipulates those around her – has her swordsman (in more ways than one if you get my meaning) kill her enemies or kill for money and is only too willing to buy young girls that have been kidnapped.

She purchases Ai-nu a spirited girl that wants no part of this life and tries to escape. Soon though she realizes that the whole town – especially the men – are under the control of Candice and that there is no escape. Candice becomes fond of the new girl and tries to teach her the ways of being a courtesan. Ai-nu being the new girl in town

is desired by all the men – even after one dies of a hairpin shoved into his brain and another from a heart attack! Candice finds herself falling in love with Ai-nu – and Ai-nu doesn't seem at all to mind her caresses and a few lengthy love scenes are played out. Sex of course changes everything as we know, and slowly the balance of power begins to shift – and Ai-ni soon has the upper hand. A young Alex Man is an honest constable who investigates the murder and finds himself both drawn and repelled by Ai-nu.

Though likely not everyone's cup of tea, the film with its wonderful sets, beautiful costumes, excellent acting, fine direction and erotic melodrama is an enjoyable peek into another genre of HK film that is not too familiar to many of us.

**Mad Cold-Blooded Murder (Hong Kong, 1981: Albert Law)** - Chan Wai Man is an illegal immigrant in Hong Kong with his wife and son. In order to make some money his wife starts working the streets. When she starts living with a wealthy client, she comes home to take her son from Chan Wai Man. He resists and fight breaks out their son is killed in the altercation. Chan Wai Man flips out and starts killing prostitutes who have the same name as his wife, who dumped him. Bruce Le and Carter Wong are cops assigned to the case.

"Chan Wai Man gets kicked in the nuts! Carter Wong gets totally ripped and stumbles around puking everywhere (no acting here folks!). Bolo gets kicked in the nuts! Bruce Le wears a Playboy shirt. Some guy gets punched in the nuts! Chan Wai falls from the top of an apartment building! Nut shots galore! People are falling from buildings all over the place!"

Okay, I had to get that out of my system. Those are pretty much the unbelievable highlights of the movie. Cold Blooded Murder isn't a straight up kung fu movie, but it certainly doesn't rely on acting and story either. The movie case actually had a "DRAMA" sticker on the spine. I thought it was nice to see Bruce Le in role where he wasn't fighting somebody over a name list or getting revenge for having his friend/teacher/parents/pet hamster murdered.

The main plot of the movie has cops Bruce Le and Carter Wong after serial killer Chan Wai Man, but there is also a side plot involving Bruce Le, Kong Do, and Bolo. The movie opens with Bruce Le hauling Kong Do off to jail. Later on in the movie Kong Do is released and gets his pal Bolo to help get even with Bruce. When Bruce and Carter Wong caught/killed Chan Wai Man I was expected it to be the end of the movie, but it wasn't. Bruce Le still had to wrap up the Bolo/Kong Do plot thread which adds nothing to the movie except to give Bruce Le some more chances to fight. Which reminds me, the fights aren't very exciting or inventive and Chan Wai Man kicks Carter Wong's and Bruce Le's asses. Carter and Bruce even have trouble fighting some common thugs.

I actually watched this movie twice and upon the second viewing I even managed to pay attention for the entire movie. I think that's as close to a recommendation as you're going to get out of me. I think I'll go watch it again...haha just kidding!

**Mad Killer (Hong Kong, 1971: Ng See-Yuen, Lo Chen)** - Kao Yuen plays Ma Tien Yeh, the second Master Lin's student, who is in love with Lin Yen Ping (Ouyang Peishan), Master Lin's daughter, but this one has betrothed her to his elder student, Kung Chiang Nan (Stanley Fung).

Kao Yuen decides to leave the school, without listening to Lin Yen Ping. On his way, he meets Stanley Fung, who doesn't want him to leave and tells him that he is ready to cancel the marriage in order that Kao Yuen can marry Yen Ping, but Kao Yuen doesn't want to return to the school and they fight. During the fight and though Stanley Fung has told him to be careful, Kao Yuen falls from the cliff and everyone thinks that he is dead.

Xu Jung (played by Wu Ma) is the son of an ancient magistrate whose student was the magistrate Hai Rai. Xu Jung is a very bad guy, robbing, kidnapping girls and harassing the villagers and Hai Rai decides to make justice in the town and Xu Jung decides to send killers to eliminate him. Master Lin, knowing about Xu Jung's bad deeds, decides to send his daughter and his son-in-law to protect Hai Rai.

While they are on their way, Kao Yuen returns to the school (after having slaughtered a whole company belonging to Xu Jung, just to "try his sword") and he tells Master Lin that he wants to kill Stanley Fung because he has stolen the girl he loved. Master Lin tells him that he sees that he has changed a lot and is about to do bad deeds and he asks him to remain in the school. Kao Yuen agrees with the condition that Master Lin can take his sword away. Of

course, the old master can't succeed and he is hurt by his own weapon. Before dying, he tells Kao Yuen that if he hadn't betrothed Yen Ping to him, it was because they are half brother and sister and that Kao Yuen is his own son he had with a female bandit who he was forced to kill because she didn't want to mend her bad habits.

Then, Kao Yuen becomes mad and slaughters the other men sent by Xu Jung to avenge his men. When he sees how good he is at fighting, Xu Jung proposes to pay him in order that he kills Hai Rai. First, Kao Yuen refuses, but when he learns that Yen Ping and her husband are Hai Rai's bodyguards, he accepts and tries to kill the magistrate.

Stanley Fung then discovers that his former friend isn't dead and they fight and he is hurt. When he tells his wife that Kao Yuen is alive, she goes at Xu Jung's house to ask him not to kill the magistrate, but he refuses. When she returns, she learns that Kao Yuen has killed his father and all his students and she goes to get revenge.

During the fight, his husband is killed and the magistrate is saved only because, as he has predicted it, Kao Yuen is killed by Yen Ping's hand. A superb story, with very good actors and fights. Stanley Fung, who is most known for his comedy roles such as in Inspector wears skirts..., shows here that he is also a good actor and a good fighter.

**Mad Monkey Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1978: Lau Kar-Leung)** - There are a few consistent themes in most of my reviews and one of those is having the name Lau Kar Leung any where in the credits will likely result in a good score. He is an incredible martial artist and an extraordinary action choreographer and both talents are on full display here. The best monkey style movie available.

Lau plays Chen, a skilled martial artist that is framed for raping local crime lord Tuan's (Lo Lieh) wife. As he is threatened with the punishment of death by drowning, his sister steps in and offers herself up to be Tuan's concubine in exchange for her brother's life which was the evil bastard's plan all along. After smashing Chen's hands, they send him on his way keeping his sister behind.

While working as a street performer Chen strikes up a friendship a young, small time thief named Monkey (Hsiao Ho). Chen hides his kung fu from his young friend at first but finally agrees to take him on as a student so they head to the mountains for training. The sequences in the mountains are very good and when Monkey thinks he knows enough, he heads back to town to face off against the local thugs and their boss. He soon finds out that he, in fact, doesn't know enough and is summarily slapped down by Tuan.

Monkey limps back to his master and tells the story of what happened and that Tuan actually framed Chen for the rape in order to get his sister. Chen is pretty pissed but can do nothing about it as his hands are useless so more training with Monkey is required. These sequences are even better than the previous ones and when the student is ready they head back for a bit of vengeance. The final fight is everything you would expect given the players involved. Awesome. Just freakin' awesome.

It is indeed standard revenge fare but when you look a bit closer we see that monkey fist isn't the only thing being taught by Chen. Hsiao Ho is perfectly cast as a street urchin with no hope of a better life and is trained to become a decent upright young man and true martial artist.

Mad Monkey Kung Fu really strikes all the right chords as both protagonists do a very nice job, we have remarkable training sequences, and the fights are spectacular. It is also worth noting that Kara Hui plays Chen's sister and has a very good fight scene as well. There is a lot of star power here and all deliver excellent performances. You won't be disappointed with anything that has Lau Kar Leung in it but this should be the absolute first one you try to find.

**Mafia vs Ninja (Taiwan, 1985: Robert Tai)** - Alexander Lo Rei plays a wandering martial arts master who quickly becomes friends with a man that has tried to kill him. He gets caught up in the middle of a war going on between the Chinese Mafia and the Japanese Ninja Warriors. He is on the Chinese side, and because of this, the Japanese try to assassinate him. While trying various times and because of failed attempts, recruit four of the best fighters from all over the world to try to kill Lo Rei.

Another movie that I have heard quite a bit about, especially when someone on a forum ask for recommendations on some "good" ninja movies, this one always makes the list. Somewhat of a hard to get a hold of movie, that is until Crash Cinema recently released this on DVD. I immediately had to have it, of course, and knowing that this was

practically the exact same group of people that made "Ninja: The Final Duel", I was really expecting to have a 'not so serious' fun time with this film, and now that it is over, what I was expecting I got.

Since the word 'Mafia' is usually associated with Italian organized crime, I can clearly say with this movie that is NOT what it is in reference to, It is referring to Chinese organized crime. lol. I have always been a fan of the star of this movie, Alexander Lo Rei, ever since I first saw him in the incredible pair of movies, "Shaolin vs Lama" and "Shaolin Temple Against Lama". If you have yet to see these two early 80's kung fu movie masterpieces, you really need to. Since then I have seen him in various films, and I don't think I've seen a ALR movie I didn't like, and this movie was no exception. I was afraid of a chopped up / spliced together kind of a movie, much like the "Venom of the Ninja Trilogy", parts taken from various Lo Rei films put together to make 1 movie, thankfully, this was not the case. The story actually made sense and was very easy to understand throughout the film, mainly because this is not really a story driven movie, but an action movie. While the fights may have been 'undercranked' a bit to make them more exciting, I really only noticed this in a few scenes. This filming trickery was not nearly used as much as other Lo Rei movies I have seen. This is the sort of movie that is not meant to be taken seriously at all, it was made in order for its viewers to have a good time while watching it, and that is exactly what I did ... I had a good time. Recommended for all you ninja-speedfigting-junkies, and the rest of you too! The rating I have chose to give it below, is more so for the pure entertainment value then to say this is a complete overall work of art, which it is not.

Of course this movie has comedy, it's a Robert Tai film after all, but not your typical Dean Shek style, it happens in a more subtle way. All mainly coming from Alexander Lo Rei's sidekick buddy, and to be honest, I did laugh at a few of his comedic bits. There wasn't too much, but just enough to mix it up a bit.

Action is quick, fast, and furious. 80's style martial arts at its best. I really enjoyed all the characters that had fight scenes in this movie, they each brought something unique to the film which really helped to increase its replay value. While the fights may have been 'undercranked' a bit to make them more exciting, I really only noticed this in a few scenes. This filming and trickery was not nearly used as much in this film, as other Lo Rei movies I have seen. There is some weapon work, knife throwing, slight wire use, and tons of hand to hand with some crazy kicking also added to the mix. Overall a very enjoyable film for all you action fanatics.

Alexander Lo Rei did his thing, and he really did himself justice in this movie. Yeah he had the whole Bruce Lee imitation thing going on through the movie, but that just added to the overall charm that is usually present in a Lo Rei film. ALR is quickly rising up my 'Favorite Male Fighters' list, and maybe after you watch this one for yourself, you might be left feeling the same way.

**Magic Beggar, The (People's Republic of China, 1987: Gao Tian-Hong, Wang Feng-Kui)** - Another day, another obscure kung fu movie from Mainland China to review. I have two or three more on the list before I go back to watching some movies that I have had in my collection for a long time now. I was interested in this one because of a review that gave it a perfect five out of five score on account of its martial arts content...yeah.

Like *Disciples of Shaolin Temple*, the version I saw didn't have any subtitles. As this one emphasized the drama a lot more than the action, it was hard to follow what was going on. I do know that it tells the story of the creator of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan. Nonetheless, we'll take a look at some of my observations regarding the film.

- Wandering fighter goes into town
  - Challenges cocky guy to fight. Gets beat down by dude's tai chi.
  - Wanderer (Yang) tries to study Tai Chi with dude's master; but is refused.
  - Wanderer starts wandering around and finds a kung fu school.
  - Wanderer leaves kung fu school after master gets arm cut off by rival.
  - Wanderer becomes a beggar and returns to the town of the tai chi master.
  - Meanwhile, tai chi master and his daughter get into a bunch of fights with rival schools or something.
  - Three fights involving the girl, who uses the tai chi sword technique, occur in the first half of the movie. Those are the best fights, even though they are "not bad" at best.
  - Attempts to use wires are pretty clumsy.
- In the second half, not much happens. Beggar Yang ends up becoming a servant at the Tai Chi master's house for some time. After a while, he finally is allowed to learn tai chi.

The movie ends with a fight scene that comes across as being tacked on. Some random guy that the Master's daughter had maimed in the first half randomly appears dressed as a Shaolin monk wanting revenge. Yang takes the dude on and beats him in like one minute. The end. There's no build-up, no tension, nothing. It's as if there had been so little fighting in the second half that the filmmakers felt that they had to put in at least something. A

disappointment.

**Magic Blade, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Chor Yuen)** - The prolific Chor Yuen (*Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972)) whose work covers many genres was an important director with The Shaw Brothers, but today his oeuvre is known less than Chang Cheh and Lau Kar-leung. The genre that I am most familiar with from his films are the *wuxia* adaptations from the Gu Long novels including this one which was taken from 天涯明月刀 (the Chinese title of the film is the same as the novel). While his direction was usually fine he has a habit to try to fit in an overabundance of plot turns and characters that can be typical in adaptations of literature. I felt this was a hindrance to many of his directed films such as *Bat Without Wings* (1980), but in this movie it worked quite well. So far, and I have many more films that I would like to see of his with most not available on R1, this is easily my favorite movie directed by Yuen.

"In lust of power and wealth, hair turns gray. On mountains old, the pine and bamboo grow."

*The Magic Blade* is a consummate *wuxia* adaptation in the *jianghu* universe. The best *wuxia* films have hearty heroes, sundry and plentiful villains, diverse powerful weaponry and a complicated plot that I will eschew discussing too much about in this review. This film has all of that. We start with the solemn hero with an absolute code of ethics bemoaning a lost love because of his quest in becoming the number one martial artist. Who better to play this than the stoic Ti Lung as Fu Hung-hsueh? He resembles Clint Eastwood in the Sergio Leone's *The Man With No Name* trilogy\* in attire while his character is much more chivalrous. Every *wuxia* badass must have a sublime and deadly weapon and Fu has his unique titular sword in tow. It is a blade that can swivel like a tonfa and looks like it would work well in mowing down your lawn as well as your enemies.

To be number 1 in the *jianghu* universe it helps to have spent years dedicated to becoming the best swordsman possible. It also helps to obtain a weapon that is so incredibly powerful that it can be used against those swordsmen who have wasted years learning their art to be number 1. What is a sword compared to the powerful Peacock Dart which can kill everything in range except your own fighters? How the device knows that I am not sure but I liked it much more than the spider weapon in another Chor Yuen film *The Web of Death* (1976). It does have another issue where it can only be used a few times, but we will ignore that as well. The Peacock Dart has been safely hidden away for many years at Peacock Mansion but a rising antagonist the mysterious Master Yu wants to obtain this magnificent weapon. Fu is entrusted with this weapon as it is no longer safe at the Peacock Mansion, but that now makes him an even bigger target than before. Will Fu survive the onslaught to finally face Master Yu (whoever he/she is)?

There is so much to like in this film. Tang Chia's (*Shaolin Intruders* (1983)) and Wong Pau-gei's fight choreography is excellent. While each fight tends to be short (Dr. Craig D. Reid notes that there are 22 fights for a total of 14 minutes and 8 seconds of action in his fun compendium *The Ultimate Guide to Martial Arts Movies of the 1970s*) the variety of weapons and situations employed are awesome. One of my favorite fight scenes is the human Chinese chess game where Fu gets caught up in the schemes of mini-mastermind Ku Wu-chi. The characters, especially the bad guys, are diverse, plentiful and quite memorable. My favorite is Devil's Grandma (Teresa Ha Ping who has been in at least 243 films) a cackling elder, who has a penchant for human pork buns, can do complex martial arts and would probably poison her son. But there are many other characters from bad guys who would rather play chess, an effeminate swordsman, a sympathetic Lo Lieh character (or is he) and countless others who will be introduced and then dispatched with quick efficiency by the hero (for example: here's a bad guy who gets a Chinese title on the screen, you think he must figure prominent in the story, wait now he is dead, never mind). The story while somewhat complicated but not overly complex like Chor Yuen's *The Duel of the Century* (1981) is full of plot turns and interesting scenarios with my favorite being the town of the dead (Yuen would repeat this scene in *Bat Without Wings*).

I easily recommend this to fans of *wuxia*. I am not sure how well others take to this because there is a fantasy element to these films that some people have trouble connecting to (not sure why when there are so many sci-fi and comic book hero films that skew reality) and the plot is one you do have to pay attention to and a second viewing does help. But this is a brilliant and fun film. The cinematography by Wong Chit is beautiful (he had already been working 20 years), the sets are ethereal and beautifully crafted and the fights, scenes, characters mentioned earlier help form one of my favorite Shaw Brother's films. Now taste my thunder bullets.

The movie has a sequel named *Pursuit of Vengeance* (1977: Chor Yuen).

**Magic of Spell (Taiwan, 1988: Chiu Chung-Hing) aka Child of Peach 2 - *Magic of Spell*** is the second in a trilogy of Taiwanese fantasy films based on the Japanese folk tale of Momotaro, or the Peach Boy. According to the story, an old, childless couple receive a giant peach that was sent from Heaven. While opening the peach, a little boy is discovered inside who declares himself to be their new son. The boy is named Momotaro, or “Peach Taro” (Taro being a common boy’s name), and he’s raised by the old couple. Meanwhile, the region is being terrorized by an army of oni, or demons. So Peach Boy teams up with a trio of talking animals—a monkey, a dog and a pheasant—and invades the demon fort. He defeats them, brings back their plundered treasure, and lives happily ever after with his family. I personally find it odd that the Taiwanese would mine Japanese folklore for their bizarre fantasy excursions, but I can only assume that the story had shown up in Taiwan in the form of manga or anime and were popular with younger audiences who lacked the WW2-era anti-Japanese baggage that older Taiwanese people would have no doubt had.

This story continues the adventures of Peach Boy (played by actress Lin Hsiao-Lan of **Heroic Fight** and **Kung Fu Wonder Child**) and his animal comrades. There’s an evil old man named Elder (Chen Shan?) who wants his youth and power restored. For the record, the old, wrinkly mask the actor wears is simultaneously goofy and creepy. So he sends his faux-Taoist sorcerer son to procure the ingredients necessary to make a youth-restoring bath. Said ingredients include the blood of virgin boys, and the flesh/pulp of the 1,000-year-old Ginseng King (played by a kid dressed as root), or the flesh of Peach Boy. The sorcerer tries to get Peach Boy, but only succeeds in killing his mother instead. The sorcerer and his cohorts—a white lady ghost (apparently played by a man), a gill man, and a strong guy carrying a boulder—then try to kidnap the Ginseng King. It flees and finds protection with Peach Boy. Peach Boy and his friends, Dog Boy, Chicken Boy (played by an adolescent girl) and Monkey Boy, invade the Elder’s palace and lots of magic and fighting ensues.

One of the weird things about Asian movies is how violent they are, even when the target audience is obviously children. Early on, the Elder’s army of samurai ghosts are kidnapping children to use their blood for the youth-restoring ritual. The mothers try to plead with the soldiers for their children, but are mercilessly cut down onscreen by the bad guys. In an American movie, the plot would deal with the attempt to save the children before being exsanguinated, with them being rescued in the end by the heroes. No such luck for the poor souls in this movie. Exit children, stage left. That’s like if the witches in **Hocus Pocus** successfully drained all the children’s life force at the end. Can you imagine how traumatizing that would be? And this film doesn’t even bat an eye at this horrible atrocity (which is portrayed offscreen, but heavily implied). Lots of people die on both sides, sometimes even gratuitously, which you’d never get in a children’s film made in this hemisphere. Try showing this in a theater today. Those hysterical mom’s organizations—those same people who wanted to ban sweatshirts with snowmen imprinted on them because they thought it was some secret cocaine lingo—would have their heads explode after having a heart attack.

Fans of the supernatural and outright bizarre will find a lot to enjoy here. You have laser-shooting Buddha statues, a bazooka-wielding fish man, gender-bending on an epic scale, an evil albino ghost who almost literally *screws* the life out of one of the good guys, bathing in blood, ginseng-powered kung fu, a giant boulder monster, a Pheasant Boy (played by a girl) whose arm turns into a pheasant head which pecks the eyes out of its enemies, and all sorts of other crazy stuff. There’s a fair helping of kung fu, including some katana action from Lin Hsiao Lan, choreographed by the director himself, Chiu Chung-Hing, and his Stuntman Team. I looked up his credits on the HKMDB and he had done some assistant action director work on Yuen Woo-Ping’s **Miracle Fighters**. I think that particular experience inspired him to make this trilogy in Taiwan, since he choreographs the weirdness with similar verve to that seen in those Yuen Clan sorcery films. The fighting is frequently sped up and wired-up, but in the context of the film, it sort of works. We’ve definitely seen better—Yuen Woo-Ping and his brothers did a better job of balancing utter weirdness with some excellent fight choreography-- but there’s just so much going on, that either you get caught up in the strangeness, or dismiss the film outright.

**Magic Warriors (Taiwan, 1989: Lee Tso-Nam, Chuang Yan-Chien) - aka Child of Peach 3, Prince of Phoenix -** Although one of this film’s alternate titles suggests a second sequel to the 1987 “kiddie” fantasy *Child of Peach*, it’s not quite that. It’s more of a spiritual successor. The impishly-cute Lin Hsiao-Lan is back in a male role as a supernaturally-powered kung fu fighting boy, but this time goes by the moniker of Xiao Fei Long, or Little Flying Dragon. Her (his) outfit is still the same, and Lin still wields a katana as her (his) principle weapon, but Peach Boy’s animal sidekicks are gone, as is the giant magical peach that helps him from time to time.

The story is alternately simple and complex, very reminiscent of *Kung Fu Cult Master*. Years ago, there was a huge war between the forces of Heaven and the forces of the Devil (who'll eventually be played by Lee Hoi-Hing, who did the action choreography for *Iron Monkey 2*). During the war, a swordsman fighting for heaven, Wu Cham (Alexander Lo Rei), deserted his side to marry an evil witch from the side of the Devil. They went into hiding, where they had a blond-haired Chinese child. Both Heaven and Hell spent so much time looking for the forbidden couple that they eventually forgot about the war, and peace was established. However, as is par for the course in these things, the child of this union could tip the balance in the war between good and evil.

Fast-forward ten years, where Little Flying Dragon is gallivanting around doing nothing of importance. He saves some women from a killer gill man, who turns out to be Evil Witch in disguise. Evil Witch needs some mortal energy to cure her sick son, and takes Little Flying Dragon home to help. Unbeknownst to them, they are being followed by the Snail Spirit, who works for Devil King and his son, Kid of the Worst (Chen Shan in a turquoise wig). Snail Spirit reports back to his master, who gathers his other Spirit underlings (including a female fly spirit and a guy in a red wig) to launch an attack on the home of Wu Cham and his wife.

A huge fight breaks out and Wu Cham is badly wounded. Little Flying Dragon is left to care for the little boy after his parents are whisked away to the Devil King's castle. Wu Cham is unceremoniously dipped in a vat of acid and reduced to a skeleton, while the Fly Spirit uses mind control powers to find out where the two are going. Little Flying Dragon prepares a Lone Wolf-esque baby cart for the boy and they arrive in a city, where a rich noble transforms them into gorillas with the intent of killing them and serving them to his guests. And that my friends, marks the first 35 minutes of so of this insane little project.

So a lot goes on in this movie, with the forces of Heaven and Hell constantly trying to kidnap the little boy (only in an Oriental film could the forces of Heaven be construed as secondary antagonists). Near the last act, the duo finds Wu Cham's older brother (also played by Alexander Lo Rei), and some more hijinks ensues before they finally storm the Devil's castle and administer the kung fu justice.

Fight-wise, this film has more and better martial arts than the previous two movies, which I imagine could be expected from Alexander Lo Rei and Lee Hoi-Hing, each of whom has a pretty pedigree in that area. Yes, there is a lot of wirework and over-the-top fu, but as a children's fantasy, it's pretty excusable. Lo Rei gets to perform some nice bootwork, especially in his role as Wu Cham's brother. Chen Shan also gets to fight quite a bit, although his moves are little more muted. His signature weapon in this movie is a whip. Lin Hsiao-Lan fights with a pair of axes in the finale, which makes for a nice change of pace from the katana she wields earlier (and the other films). There are also lots of bombs and explosions used in the fights as well. It feels like a 90s Ching Siu-Tung film made two years earlier on smaller budget and written by a 10-year-old kid running his own D&D campaign.

When the characters aren't fighting, they're engaging in vulgar comedy (pee drinking, a naked kid's bum shooting liquid poo into a character's face, the like) and all sorts of supernatural shenanigans. There are teleportation spells, lots of spirits (in addition to the ones I mentioned, there's a Mushroom Spirit and an Evergreen Spirit on the side of Heaven), magic potions that transform people into gorillas, kung fu used to heal people, Lin Hsiao-Lan vomiting a fountain of blood as part of the healing process ("It's only a kid's film"), and more. It's just that insane and for that, I recommend this to anyone interested in the most bizarre films that cinema has to offer.

**Magnificent, The (Hong Kong, 1978: Chan Siu-Pang, Kim Hyeong-Jun) aka Dragon Master** - Set in 1911, this film deals with a general (played by Chan Sing) who plans to use an old lord (and his coat of arms, which would be used as a symbol) to overthrow the newly established Republic and restore the old Qing order. The local commissioner (Carter Wong Ka Tat) will try to thwart his plans, gaining help from the lord's daughter (Doris Cheung) on his way.

This one's a mixed bag. Directed by Chan Siu Pang (director of *The 18 Bronzemen* and *The Fatal Flying Guillotines*) and with Godfrey Ho credited as assistant director, it starts with a nice fight in a mountain set up that gets ruined by the credits running and interrupting...

Then, we get rather boring and confusing stuff (there's also a Dragon Lee cameo at a point, but some awkward editing butchers his fight and we don't know what happens to him - it literally goes "fight starts between Chan Sing and two of Wong's men, including Dragon Lee"/"switch to Carter Wong's office where he decides to go investigate"/"Carter Wong is now on the scene of the fight" with an obvious cut between Wong's office and Wong facing Chan Sing) until the focus gets on Carter Wong and Doris Cheung trying to find a way to defeat Chan Sing. The movie is available on the Shaolin Iron Men set about *Bronzemen*, but it must be really only because it has *18 Bronzemen* star Carter Wong in it and also because Chan Sing practices a style called the Golden Bell that makes him immune to blows and hits from weapons until you hit a certain vital point - even that is confused, because it seems you must hit said vital point (or about 30 of them...) before poking his eyes and kicking him in the groin (while a

combo of these two seemed enough in other movies - go figure), though here it's more grabbing the groin (insert sexist comment about Doris Cheung grabbing a guy's groin, cause she's the one who does it). Anyway, the Golden Bell/vital points thing leads to great training scenes with Carter Wong and Doris Cheung, while Chan Sing looks pretty badass practising his Golden Bell.

Not a bad start for the *Kickin' It Shaolin Style* set. I expected it to be much worse seeing the slow and rather boring start, but the enjoyable score (I especially like the tune to which Wong and Cheung train), the performances by Chan Sing (who's a great bad guy in this one), Carter Wong (who is a bit stone-faced but a good lead) and Doris Cheung (her character isn't ruined by a dub that has her saying "daddy" a lot, which sounds a bit ridiculous) and the really good action (the leads have nice moments and there's some great kicking in there) make the movie watchable and it gets really enjoyable in the second half when it loses the big confusing stuff.

**Magnificent Bodyguards (Hong Kong, 1978: Lo Wei)** - Shot in 3D and partially fun because you never did see Jackie Chan in many swordplay movies, Lo Wei otherwise makes his presence felt as he delivers a deadly dull and uneventful Wuxia pian. Ku Long's script is straightforward enough with an escort mission and a kung-fu road movie feel being easy to attach to. But with very little creativity to spice up this high flying, fantastical universe (the traps-sequence involving Chan and a snake does stand out however) and instead an overabundance of talking (more of Lo Wei's tools of the trade), *Magnificent Bodyguards* falls flat early and never recovers. The 3D gimmick is present in spades with a lot of weaponry, kicks, fists and objects coming at us but not only is it annoyingly in our face, technically many shots are so sloppy that someone either should've caught it on the day or trimmed frames in editing. Mostly consisting of music cues from what sounds like a Western but primarily John Williams' score for *Star Wars*, it provides some awkward, aural fun and the finale at least brings the martial arts up a notch with some ferocious fighting. Co-starring James Tien and Bruce Leung.

**Magnificent Butcher, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - When Wong Fei Hung's famous student Lam Sai-Wing (Sammo Hung), gets framed for murder by a rival Martial Arts school. He must use his wits and strength to save his life, and clear his name. Aided by his fellow students and the highly intoxicated but helpful Beggar King (Fan Mei-Shang).

*"Hand over Butcher Wing, or I'll tear this school apart"*

A classic Golden Harvest production, featuring the very first collaboration between Sammo Hung and Yuen Wo-Ping. These two titans of Hong Kong cinema, joined forces to create some high calibre Kung Fu action. Sammo Hung is at the peak of his physical talents here, he was born to play the portly, naive, Martial Arts butcher, who was a student of the legendary Wong Fei Hung. Kung Fu comedy was still big in Asia at this time, and while a lot of the humour might be lost on Western audiences, it's still a great example of this sub-genre. This being a Hong Kong production, means there still some darker elements in the film. Wong Jing was one of the films script writers after all. He collaborated with writer Edward Tang, who went onto script many of Jackie Chan's biggest cinematic hits.

Unlike a lot of Kung Fu actioners of the era, the movie doesn't start with a fight or demonstrations over the credits. Even the first scuffle isn't really a scuffle, it's more of a calligraphy duel/battle of words. Butcher Wing had beaten up an old man up, whom he believed to be a thief. Despite apologizing to the man, he still goes to the head of the local Five Dragons school, Master Ko (Lee Hoi-San), complaining and spinning yarns about what really happened. Naturally this infuriates Ko, who's clearly not a man with much patience to start with. When we first see Ko, he's practicing his various forms and his deadly Iron Palm technique. Smashing a huge stone block into grit within seconds. His palms glow so red, it would make even Chao Chi-Hao (Lo Lieh) from *King Boxer*, turn green with envy.

*"You seem to have a limp wrist, where's your strength?"*

When an angry Ko arrives at Wong Fei Hung's school in search of Lam Sai-Wing (Butcher Wing), he gets more than he bargained for. The always calm and collective Wong Fei Hung (Kwan Tak-Hing) is sat at a table, showing his skills as a calligraphist. What follows is a superb set piece, where Ko tries to stop Wong from writing. Even his powerful and fatal Iron Palm technique isn't enough to help him get the upper hand. Leaving him humiliated and with even more hate for Lam Sai-Wing. They say action's, speak louder than words, and that's very true in the case of this sequence. I could write multiple paragraphs about the scene, and still not do it justice.



The late Fung Hak-On is on top form here, as the devious sex crazed son of Master Ko, Ko Tai-Hoi. Could anyone else play this role better?. You might say he's the real villain of the movie. Master Ko is clearly a short tempered and violent man, but he's not portrayed as a leery, two faced murderer. He's often shown to be dragged into situations, through all the lying and scheming his son does. Which is how Lam Sai-Wing gets pulled into defending Ko Tai-Hoi, when he's wildly attacked by Wing's club wielding estranged brother, Sai Kwong(Chiang-Kam). Circumstantial comedy and misunderstandings, are a staple of the late 70's comedy Fu production, this story has plenty of it.

*"Watch out for my rear"*

Fan Mei-Sheng(The Buddhist Fist) makes for a great chicken starved drunken master/beggar king, he was brought in to replace Simon Yuen. Yuen Wo-Ping's dad sadly passed away shortly after production began, so they re-cast the movie, re-starting the production from scratch. The beggar king just happens to fall off the back of a cart, as it passes through the town where this story takes place. It's not long before he's stealing chickens and getting smashed on the local wine. Not to mention wowing people with his expert Kung Fu skills and knowledge. He's a far cry from the local drunks I see fighting over a bottle of cider in the town centre. I really need to find out what kind of wine/vintage these old drunken masters preferred?

When the old master stumbles into the local off license, he just happens to bump into Ko Tai-Hoi and his dim witted lackey. Bruce Lee movie stuntman/movie regular and genuine tough guy Billy Chan. The pair get humiliated by the old man's impressive nimble skills. At the same time, the beggar king picks up a section of a broken wine vase, and proceeds to neck the contents. Taking full advantage of the situation and drinking the wine he couldn't afford to purchase earlier. The choreography here is comedic, intricate and performed to a high standard. It's clear Fan Mei-Sheng is being doubled at times, but you would expect that, with his age and build. While I'm not 100% certain, I'm sure it's Sammo Hung who doubled him for the kick he gives to Fung Hak On??., when Fung's stood atop the wine shelves. I could be wrong, but it just looked like a Sammo style kick to me.

The next dust up, ups the ante and gets a even more serious. The old master meets the young Butcher Wing, who's been conned into a fight by Ko Tai-Hoi. The ensuing obligatory tea room throw down is top notch. While it's played for laughs, there's some really nice hand to hand styles on display. However the best is still to come, in terms of the action. The story does get a little bogged down in the middle of the film, but you are later rewarded with one of the best displays of screen combat, ever put on film.

*"Are you threatening me?, I'm not scared of anyone"*

When Master Ko and his three top fighters turn up at Wong Fei Hung's school, looking to break up the dojo sign and deal with Butcher Wing. Their greeted by Wing's fellow students played by Opera/Martial Arts wizard Yuen Biao, and former Shaw Brothers star Wai Pak. What follows is a great example of classic old school action, done Hong Kong style. The campy Fan Man(Lam Ching-Ying) and aggressive Monkey Pole Man(Yuen Miu), are more than a match for the two heroic students. Biao's scuffle with Lam Ching-Ying features some sweet choreography. In one of the many stunning sequences, he manages to lose his jacket all while still fighting on. The highly rhythmic action builds more and more, as the scene plays out. Weapons fans, get treated to some Monkey Staff countered by Wai Pak's tonfa and sword. While this isn't a weapons heavy feature, it does have some nice displays. With Lam Ching-Ying demonstrating a very high standard of Fan and leg work. It's a great scene, that I rate higher than the finale, but that's only by a few notches.

Chung Fat(Encounters Of A Spooky Kind) deserves highlighting, as the maniacal and highly strung Crazy Cat. His performance makes Jackie Chan's cats claw in Snake In The Eagles Shadow, look like kid's stuff. He brings a great physicality to his performance, especially during his encounter with Butcher Wing in the old undertakers building. He springs from one of the dusty old coffins, like a cat on a hot tin roof. A strong comedic fight follows, with Sammo Hung giving a visual nod to Enter The Dragon in the process.

*"You've a nerve, robbing in broad day light"*

Sammo and Yuen Wo-Ping's style blended really-well together, with a combination of both power and intricacy, seldom seen from other choreographers of the era. For me the best of the action takes place in the movies final thirty minutes. We get treated to two fights in quick succession. A powerful one sided riverboat fight, which must have been handled solely by Sammo?. Quickly followed by the films intense swan song fight, between Butcher Wing and Master Ko. With commentary by the old beggar, who calls some of the moves, just like Sam Seed does in Drunken Master. It's an epic encounter, with both Sammo and Lee Hoi-San giving it their all. This dust up features some great action, especially for fans of animal styles. There's also the fictional Cosmic Palm style, which Ko spent thirty years mastering. According to Bey Logans Magnificent Butcher commentary, Yuen Baio doubled Lee Hoi-San

for the moments when his character performs the splits. Magnificent Butcher might just feature one of Lee Hoi-San's greatest action and Martial Arts performances?.

This picture is not without it's, faults, things feel a little rushed towards the end of the movie, did they really need to include the assault/murder scene?. However there are far more positives than negatives. My review only touches the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the little details Hung and Wo-Ping have put into the movie. At an hour and forty minutes, it's also ten minutes longer than your average Kung Fu movie run time, despite the deletion of some scenes. Including a sequence where Butcher Wing tries to patch up the old man he busts up earlier in the movie, before he runs off to Master Ko. There's just a few things I'd like to mention before finishing my ramblings.

Jo Jo Chan(The Phantom Killer) really deserved to have more screen time, but she makes a very strong screen debut here. Veteran actress Tong Ching(Dreadnought), is given little to do other than look pretty, as Chaing Kam's wife. While Chain Kam doesn't get to show off any shapes, he does show a very unorthodox fighting style, in two scenes. His approach is probably more-closer to how a real street attack, would look. Especially the moment when he attacks Fung Hak-On in an alley way. There's no flowery moves here, he's just all out crazed and angry, and it shows in his fighting style. Kwan Tak Hing looks nimble and healthy in his second to last screen appearance. A veteran for countless Wong Fei Hung films, from the early days of Hong Kong cinema. Despite being in his eighties, he's was still incredibly- nimble for his age. Performing some impressive four finger push-ups and stretches. If you have yet to see this one, then you should get hold of a copy during your next shopping spree. It's a must see, for fans of Sammo Hung, Lee Hoi-San and Yuen Wo-Ping.

**Magnificent Chivalry, The (Taiwan, 1971: Li Su)** - A standout in Wang Yu's extensive filmography within martial arts and swordplay, he is swordsman Li Biao who's asked to retrieve stolen money from the Black Tiger Gang. Infiltrating them and then finding out he's got lost family relations within the gang, stage is set for classic but basic drama. Meaning The Magnificent Chivalry prides itself on the simple and straightforward. There IS a story told that is not a feeble excuse for action and both aspects really do the genre proud in a way. With Wang Yu sporting different looks on a few occasions throughout, the capable brawler really merges with the swordplay hero here as the action is weapons based but basher like in nature. Add to all of that fast delivery of the choreography and a ferocious, primal nature to this main selling point, The Magnificent Chivalry does many things right even more technically able genre-cinema in the latter half of the decade failed at.

**Magnificent Ruffians, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Chang Cheh)** - This movie features one of the best examples of Chang Cheh homosexual subtext. The four protagonists go to Lu Feng's house and are instructed to take a bath before having a big feast. They walk into the luxurious bathroom, and come running out, scared, because there are women taking a bath and wanting the guys' company. They then *ask the servants to get the girls out of the bath*, after which the four men run and jump into the bath and start splashing and frolicking in the water. Other than that, there is some really good choreography and the final fight is pretty friggin' awesome, in terms of traditional weapons choreography.

**Magnificent Swordsman (Hong Kong, 1968: Griffin Yueh, Cheng Kang)** - *Magnificent Swordsman* is obviously influenced by Japanese Chanbara films, whether Kurosawa or Zatoichi is a matter of opinion. One thing it has in common with Japanese films that were popular at the time is having a rather ugly star, Wong Chung Sun, (mostly recognized in the west as the treacherous uncle in *Way of the Dragon*, or the Cook/Japanese Spy in *Fist of Fury*.) as the leading man. Many Japanese films had stars such as Katsu and Wayakama (brothers, actually) who were pretty repellant by today's standards, yet prowled the screen as manly men, irresistible to women, and extremely strong, despite basically a pear shape. Of course, there was a time when men were judged more on success or ability than appearance, so maybe it wasn't such a bad thing. Wong's Jiang even carries a sword cane, like Zatoichi.

Wong made a career of playing heavies. Tall and rangy, he was fairly intimidating. This was one of the rare occasions that he played the good guy, like Tung Li's turn in the Black Tavern. Sadly, the Magnificent Swordsman is no Black Tavern. Having two directors, you can tell there is a different pace in some of the scenes, as well as the meandering beginning. One of the things the film lack is an interesting villain. Black Tavern had Ku Feng, while this movie has Cheng Miu, who isn't particularly threatening, even when he twirls his chain. Tien Feng appears late in the film as a hired assassin, but it is a little late. Top billing in the movie actually goes to Shu Pei Pei, as the damsel in distress. Considering she is the star, she actually has little to do. She doesn't know martial arts and mostly runs around crying throughout the movie. Tien Fang comes in at the last 20 minutes to liven things up.

The Climax is well done, however, as Wong uses the landscape to offset the odds, docking and dodging through various structures and even some logs to overcome the bandits. This is one of the most obviously Japanese influenced Shaw Wu Xia movies I have seen. There is only one or two scenes of wire work, and that is a jump a top a roof at the end. The music seems to have been gleaned from Zatoichi as well as the ending.

Still, worth catching as a curiosity if only to see Wong play against type.

**Magnificent Trio, The (Hong Kong, 1966: Chang Cheh)** - For a viewer such as myself who've really become a Chang Cheh admirer very late in the game, the biggest thrill of his 1960s work in particular has been the realization that they've survived, thematically. The Magnificent Trio, his third Shaw Brother's movie, may not stand as the most thoroughly executed due to some lagging pace and off-key handling of melodrama. It's still remarkably engaging and it doesn't need to rely solely on action either.

His swordplay drama is one about the corrupted powers within wealth and that it takes a view from the outside to make certain individuals realize what actually is justice in this world. By no means superbly layered throughout its entire character gallery, Chang still manage to push most of the correct buttons and while he may not have realized it, his themes were ones that still today packs a punch and could easily be applied to modern day as we know it.

Jimmy Wang Yu may have hit his stride as an actor under the direction of Chang Cheh in One-Armed Swordsman but he, along with Lo Lieh and Cheng Lei really do make picture perfect poster boys for righteousness. A favourite theme of Chang's as well as that of sworn loyalty between brothers, where strong love for women become secondary. That's not to say that Chang wasn't a romantic as there are sensitive patches of hopeful romance on display but the violent spiral of events leads to bloodshed that has to take place with the women out of the frame and frey. They do matter in this particular story though as they too ultimately are greatly affected by what goes on outside the sealed doors of wealth and Chang therefore reaches a balance of goals for both his heroes and the women around them.

**Magnificent Wonderman, The (South Korea, 1978: Kim Seon-Gyeong)** - Previously an extremely rare film presumably sitting in IFD's (or whatever their company name is) film vaults. With Thomas Tang and George Lai's names attached one assumes that this is an unfinished Korean film re-edited by Asso Asia.

Bandits arrive at Shaolin disguised as monks with the intention of stealing a golden statue of Buddha. With the abbot deposed and all opposing monks removed it seems that there is no-one to stand in their way; if only they knew where the statue was hidden. And just who is that simple mute guy (Casanova Wong) who seems to be suspiciously agile and always hanging about the place ?

This is not a classic by any means but certainly passable as entertainment serving up quality fight action that showcases Casanova Wong's kicking. At times the choreography seems a bit repetitive (leading round house followed by spinning kick, sometimes a jump - over and over again) but the fights are fast paced enough without resorting to undercranking. Production values are unsurprisingly low, and on occasion rather sloppy; the mystique of ancient China is somewhat ruined when you can see an electricity pylon in the background (see pic). Despite all this the last half hour is filled with enough action to keep most kung fu fans happy.

**Magnum Fist (Taiwan, 1978: Hon Bo-Cheung) – aka The Great Hero** – Confusing as hell can't even begin to describe this Bruce Li film. Re-teaming Li with the director of ENTER THE PANTHER (uh oh), this proves to be one of the most muddled Bruce Li films, which is a shame because when there is fighting on-screen, the film really takes off.

The movie has the age old good Chinese/bad Japanese plot during WWII, as a group of Japanese soldiers invade a small Chinese town. The film starts off promising enough with Li taking out 4 Japanese soldiers trying to steal some chickens. It is a great fight scene, with Li even breaking out a staff to beat these guys down. Unfortunately, fighting of this caliber (along with Li) are not seen on the screen for the next 45 minutes! Instead, we have the bumbling antics of the Japanese soldiers and their obese commander (who looks like Sammo Hung with a shaved head and Hitler moustache). Li shows up again for a big forest brawl about 1 hour (yes, 1 hour) in. The film then drags on for another 20 minutes before it quickly ends when the Japanese giving up the war...the end!

While somewhat better than the dire ENTER THE PANTHER, MAGNUM FIST doesn't fare much better. The two or three fight scenes with Li are very good, but the film's tone is so whacked that one can't help wonder what the filmmakers wanted. The comedy relief with the Japanese is really bad. So bad that they actually have trumpets do the "wah, wah, wah, wwwaaahhhh" at the end of each gag. But all the stuff with Li is deadly serious. And given his

limited screen time, he almost seems like a supporting character to the Japanese! Like ETP, I would recommend this one for hardcore Bruce Li aficionados only.

**Man Called Tiger, A (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Wei)** - The story is simple, and yet unnecessarily complex. Wang Yu plays Chin Fu, a Chinese kung fu expert who heads over to Japan looking for work among the local Yakuza. After beating up an enforcer (Han Ying Chieh, who doubled as the film's fight choreographer) at the local night club, Chin Fu is invited by Yakuza boss Shimizu to be one of his right-hand men. His job is to take back the extortion racket from the rival Yakuza gang led by Yamamoto (Tien Feng), one business at a time. One such business is a Chinese restaurant ran by a fellow kung fu student (James Tien). The two secretly meet and we learn that Chin Fu's father had some dealing with the Yakuza, which ultimately caused him to lose his school and commit suicide. So he's posing as a Yakuza in order to find out the truth. James Tien's character offers to go undercover in Yamamoto's organization to find out what he can, but the movie quickly forgets about him until the climax.

To be perfectly honest, the deeper into the story we go, the less everything makes sense. Subplot after subplot is added, including no less than two female characters who are looking for their fathers; an attempt by Han Ying Chieh to get back in his boss's graces by killing Chin Fu; a love interest subplot involving a girl, Iliako (Maria Yi), who works for Yamamoto; and a climax involving high stakes gambling where no less than three new important characters are introduced. Moreover, we never find out *\*what\** caused Chin Fu's father to commit suicide (only who was responsible), which was the whole reason for the film to exist in the first place! In other words, there's far too much plot for a 76-minute kung fu movie. Originally, this was supposed to be Bruce Lee's third movie, until the Little Dragon had a falling out with director Lo Wei. With that in mind, you'll notice a large similarity in the casts of this film and both **The Big Boss** and **Fist of Fury**. I sort of wonder how it might've turned out with Bruce in the lead role, and I can't help but think that it would've been almost as uneven as **The Big Boss**, with the fight scenes being the memorable part while viewers would just ignore everything in between (at least this would've benefitted from having more Bruce Lee action than his Freshman effort).

But if you can't get the best, then you at least try to get the...*\*cough\**...second best. To be perfectly honest, the second best would've been Angela Mao Ying, but the idea of a Chinese woman going to Japan circa 1970 to become a Yakuza enforcer is rather silly, so I can see why they stuck with a male actor. Obviously, in 1973, the title of "second best" would've gone to Ti Lung (on contract at the Shaw Brothers), Chen Sing, or Yasuaki Kurata...so then you go to the guy whose name had the greatest marquee value, so you get Jimmy Wang Yu. Now, remember the first **Austin Powers** movie where Elizabeth Hurley can hardly believe that Austin Powers was a sex symbol in his day, only for her mother to explain to her that back in the 60s, you didn't need to be handsome to be a sex symbol? Well, Hurley well could've been talking about Jimmy Wang Yu in this movie. The man always looked as if he had gotten beaten with the ugly stick at some point in his life, although his face hadn't gotten pudgy at this point, and yet there are no fewer than four...FOUR...attractive women who are trying to get a piece of his wang (pun fully intended). Despite all that potential to be sleazy, there's less exploitation of women than there was in the two Bruce Lee movies that Lo Wei directed. Wang Yu is more interested here in being a stoic bad-a\*\* and punching people in the face, which he does handily.

On the subject of brawling and beating, the action here is handled by Han Ying Chieh, who had choreographed the non-Bruce Lee fights in **The Big Boss** and **Fist of Fury**. It's typical early 70s basher stuff. Jimmy Wang Yu swings his arms so much that he threatens to up and take flight. Actually, he looks better in his fights than James Tien does, which leads me to believe that only Jackie and Sammo knew how to bring out the best in Mr. Tien. Wang Yu brings a manic energy to his fist fights which actually help us understand how Wang Yu could win so many street fights despite his lack of formal martial arts training. His kicks are generally low and uncoordinated, but there's a nice bit at the end where he's hopping around on one leg after taking a few blows with an axe, but is still able to perform multiple jumping front crescent kicks to his attackers' faces. In fact, the entire final fight is Jimmy Wang Yu fighting off a contingent of thugs armed with axes, and not just your average hatchet. These dudes are wielding fire axes! He takes more licks than Bruce Lee typically would have, and I'm pretty sure if Lo Wei had gotten Lee to do this movie, they would've had to bring in some fighter to even up the score. Han Ying Chieh fights a little, but don't expect a lot from him. Also, look for a young Lam Ching-Ying as one of Shimizu's thugs in the early fight sequences and during the finale. Han Ying and Lo Wei spice up the fights with some motorcycle and car chases, plus one fight sequence set inside an aerial tramway, predating a similar sequence in **Moonraker** by a good six years. The fights are fun for what they are, but you'll most likely forget them a few minutes after the movie ends. Such is the way of the basher movie.

Well, Jimmy Wang Yu, I've paid my debt to you. I've seen the movie that I so often had the opportunity to rent, but preferred a second or third renting of **Rumble of the Bronx** instead. You are now avenged, my blood debt is paid. You hear that, Wang Yu!? Paid! In full! I owe you nothing! Nothing, I say! Don't you try to *\*make\** me watch **Blood**

of the Dragon or the **One-Armed Swordsman** films! Those weren't part of the plan! Yes, I will watch **Beach of the War Gods** in short order, but that's it! Then I'm through! You won't have Dr. Haing S. Ngor to kick around anymore!

**Man from Hong Kong, The (Hong Kong/Australia, 1975: Brian Trenchard-Smith)** - A Golden Harvest production made largely in Australia and starring Jimmy Wang Yu and George Lazenby, with Sammo Hung doubling as a supporting actor and the martial arts choreographer. Curiously, its theme song, "Sky High," from a group called Jigsaw, was a top-40 hit in the '70s. I remember the song and recently heard it on an oldies radio show, but I never knew it originated with this film. ("You've blown it all sky high, by telling me a lie...") This film got released in the U.S. as "The Dragon Flies" in 1975, not much of an appetizing title, if you ask me.

It's not a very good movie, slowed down as it is by mundane romantic interludes with two different unremarkable Aussie females, and unexciting car, motorcycle and foot chases that go on forever, filled with lame "gags."

There are a lot of fight scenes, but they're not terribly imaginative. I couldn't tell if it was because the Aussie producers vetoed Sammo's more clever ideas and made him dumb it down, so to speak, or if Wang Yu's style of fighting made it difficult for Sammo to do his usual choreography. Plus, Sammo couldn't speak English. There's really only one HK-style fight scene and it involves Jimmy vs. a room full of Chinese martial arts students working for the bad guy and they use a lot of traditional weapons. I recognized one of the students as Lam Ching Ying.

Still, it's a different side of Wang Yu than we're used to seeing from his Shaw Bros. and early Golden Harvest films.

**Mantis Fist and Tiger Claws of Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1977: Simon Chui, Cheung Sum)** - Boss Hung's youngest son becomes infatuated with a barmaid named Shung Shung. Pi is a stranger who has just arrived in town looking for his long lost sister and he gets into a fight with Hung's youngest son over the girl Shung Shung. One day Hung's youngest son and a few of his friends trap and rape Shung Shung in the woods. They are murdered shortly after by a mysterious creature with exceptional martial arts skills who hides in trees. When Boss Hung hears the news about his son's death the blame quickly is shifted upon Pi who had an altercation earlier that day. Several girls have disappeared in recent months and they have been sold into prostitution by Boss Hung. The girls are taken to a place called the orchid house and Pi soon learns that his sister is one of the girls being held captive there.

Mantis Fists and Tiger Claws of Shaolin is one strange film that centers around an idea that there is a half mantis/half human killing machine on the loose. The action in this film is no holds bar as anything and everything goes. The initial fighting scenes with the half mantis/half human killing machine are done from the victims' point of view and just like old monster movies the monster is hidden for as long as possible. We finally get to see the half mantis/half human killing machine in the film's final showdown. The beast looks like a Muppet on acid and is not intimidating in the least. How this beast came about is one of the most ingenious plot devices ever used in any film.

One day while Shung Shung's mother lay under a tree resting a preying mantis crawls up her dress and into her ovaries thus fertilizing her womb which leads to the birth of a mantis/human hybrid.

A lot of the fights are brutal and bloody as bamboo and other deadly objects pierce flesh. Dean Shek of who frequently has starred opposite Jackie Chan is delirious as Boss Hung aka Big Master. Keeping in tow with deformities in Kung Fu movies one of the sons is a hunchback who has spikes on his back. One part of the story that is not only disturbing but also feels highly improbable is how each of Boss Hung's three sons' on different occasions rape Shung Shung. Even though the continued raping of Shung Shung is integral to the overall plot it becomes repetitive quickly. Overall Mantis Fists and Tiger Claws of Shaolin is a movie that is never dull as it moves along at a brisk pace.

**Mantis Under Falcon Claws (South Korea, 1983: Joe Moung-Hua)** - Called *Mantis Under Falcon's Claws* on the package, the disc label and the DVD menu. A 1983 Filmark production directed by a Mitch Wong (I give it about as much credibility as to Gofrey Ho directing an other much better Korean production released by IFD under the title *5 Pattern Dragon Claws*). Joseph Lai's brother George is (credited as) the production manager and Godfrey Ho is credited as "production designer".

That film is quite a mess. It's pretty confused (at a point, it seems like the story is given up for something completely different - I came to wonder if it was a cut-and-splice job with two Asian movies) and the characters are very hit and miss - the villain is pretty cool (not "Hwang Jang Lee cool", but still badass) and the father of the kidnapped girl is

hilarious, but the main character is obnoxious. The dub can be funny at times (especially the father of the kidnapped girl and his ridiculous voice), the soundtrack is enjoyable (these films always have some cool themes - and I keep wondering where they were "borrowed" from) and you get some funny bits here and there, as well as some very WTF moments.

The action is, well... The final brawl is a good one, but the rest isn't that great - not that there is that much to begin with.

**Marco Polo (Hong Kong, 1975: Chang Cheh) - aka The Four Assassins** - Chang Cheh assembles a fantastic cast, albeit at the start of their careers, for this epic kung fu spin on the adventures of medieval European explorer Marco Polo. Set in the late 13th century the film is obviously not a true account of any actual events.

Marco Polo (Richard Harrison) has become a trusted servant of the ruling Mongol emperor Kublai Khan (that bits true at least) and is tasked with dealing with a band of rebels. After an excellent initial tournament scene, used to introduce the main villains, immediately followed by a doomed assassination attempt led by Carter Wong, Marco Polo sets off to capture the rebel leader. With him he has Iron Palm master Leung Kar Yan, double sword wielding Gordon Liu and grappling expert Wang Lung Wei.

Instead of the capturing the rebel leader they kill him and arrest his wife. However she is rescued by four young rebels including Fu Sheng and Kwok Chui in his first role as a light skill exponent. The group takes refuge in a village famed for the martial arts master that lives there and ask to become students. However under the rule of the Mongols the practice of martial arts is banned and instead the four are set to work and given tasks that will secretly develop their fighting skill (in a karate kid wash on, wash off kind of way). While Marco Polo undergoes a change of heart over the plight of the Chinese rebels, his men have no sympathy and track the four down leading to the inevitable showdown.

Chang Cheh directs with his usual knack for keeping a story interesting and injecting action at just the right places. Set designs are typically lavish but really its the talent on display that will keep your attention. Leung Kar Yan, in only his second role, again looks impressive and Gordon Liu's double sword technique is simply dazzling. From a martial arts performance point of view its probably Kwok Chui who steals the show though in the kind of role that was given to Chiang Sheng in the Venoms movies. He gets to show off his full acrobatic repertoire delivered with amazing timing and accuracy. The skill of the actors is complimented nicely by Chang Cheh's direction with the use of hand held cameras getting right into the middle of the action. As the central character Fu Sheng gives the film its soul and lights up every scene with the sense of playfulness he always carried (even if this is definitely not a comedy).

The film follows very much the classic structure of seventies kung fu movies with initial fight scenes, followed by extensive training sequences and finally the great punch up climax. And if you like extended fight scenes then this is for you.

**Mar's Villa (Taiwan, 1979: Ting Chung) - aka Wu Tang Magic Kick** - Ma Tien Lang (John Liu) is a successful business man who is targeted by the evil Fang Kang (Phillip Ko Fei). When Kang starts attacking Ma's workforce he's forced to use his lethal leg skills to deal with him and his gang. Fang Kang is killed in the ensuing fight and at first it appears Ma's trouble are over. That it is until a mysterious stranger (Stephen Tung Wai) turns up looking to challenge his skills. To make matters worse, Kang's older brother Yu Kang shows up looking to get his violent and twisted revenge.

The man with the magic kick John Liu and the multi talented Phillip Ko Fei star in this old school production from The Great China Film Co Hong Kong. This was the companies second to last film with Of Cook & Kung Fu being their final movie after Wu Tang Magic Kick. This is independent Kung Fu film relies more on the capable talents of the cast and the beautiful Taiwanese locations on display. The story opens with some stunning shots of a Buddhist temple. They clearly didn't have much money for big fancy production values and a large cast of actors/extras. That should not put you off however because this is still an entertaining and action packed hour and thirty minutes. The subject of this month theme Phillip Ko performs double duty here playing two stern faced martial arts masters who are brothers. Ko is student of Choy Li Fut Kung Fu and he began to work for the Shaw Brothers studio as stuntman in his late teens. His first appearance on screen was in Chang Cheh's The Heroic One's (1970). He later left the company in 1972 to work as an actor and fight choreographer in Taiwan. He did return to the Hong Kong film business but

would continue to work in multiple countries for the rest of his career. We will get back to the veteran Asian actor later in the review. Now let's take a look at the film's plentiful fight scenes.

The action on display in *Wu Tang Magic* is not the most original or groundbreaking when compared to some movies of the era. That's not to say Stephen Tung Wai & Ga Hoi's work has nothing to offer in terms of fight action, far from it. A lot of the film's fights are quite short and to the point which I really liked. There are some epic encounters thrown into the mix and the finale as you can imagine is no brief encounter. Ma Tien confronting Fang Kang is a good example of the film's well staged but shorter fights. There is some use of super human leaps as people jump onto and from high walls and balconies, but for the most parts the choreography is very grounded and less fantastical. During one scene a stuntman takes a very impressive fall from a balcony into a table full of terracotta pots. Apart from the table there's nothing else to break the guys fall. I'd like to know how much some of these old school stuntmen got paid to put their necks on the line in such a way. The film is no stunt fest like some Hong Kong movies but that fall more than deserved to be highlighted.

The film's action directors actually get to face off against each other in a number of scenes. Their short fight on a large wooden bridge being one of my personal highlights. There's some really nice moves on display and I love the way the camera captures the action. There's some very effective shots of the pair with the camera looking up at them from the side of the bridge. One of the more lengthy showdowns sees John Liu facing multiple attackers armed with swords and spears. Whilst his character's brother in law is tied above some bamboo stakes. The only thing keeping him from being impaled is a large bucket of water, that counter balances his body weight. Only there's a hole in the bucket so there's a great sense of urgency during this scene. We even get to see Liu briefly wielding a sword as he dodges sharp spears from all angles.

*Wu Tang Magic Kick* is a good showcase for Phillip Ko's upper body skills, but unfortunately he doesn't do a great deal of legwork. Was this to help make the hero's magic kick technique more impressive?, or was Ko injured at the time of filming?. There's only Ga Hoi and Stephen Tung Wai who could know the real reasons for this but it's a bit odd. Ko might not be known for his boot work in the same way Casanova Wong might be yet he's always been a very well rounded screen fighter. We do get to see him perform some nice Eagles Claw which is the only animal style I could spot in the whole film. It's so effective that the hero must team up with his right hand man to face him in the epic final encounter. While I always enjoy the action on display in this movie, the use of slow-motion is overused at times in my opinion. The final fight drags a little in places due to the fact they use the slow motion technique a little too much. That said Ko's gets to show off some nice looking hand based fighting techniques as he block and counters his opponents.

This movie reminds me of another Kung Fu flick I watched this year *Rage Of The Wind*(1973). Not in terms of the story but the fact there's only one female character in the whole movie. The late Tang Pao-Yun being a very prominent and important character in the story. While she wasn't known for her Martial Arts skills she had a long career in film between 1962 to 1983, appearing in forty five films. This production being one of her last few roles onscreen. Tang Pao does a fine job here playing the caring and very striking wife of Ma Tien Lang who becomes the focus of a leery Stephen Tung Wai. Speaking of Tung Wai he certainly delivers a fine villainous performance onscreen. One of his earliest roles was that of a young Shaolin monk who Bruce Lee tests in an iconic scene from *Enter The Dragon*. Sun Yueh plays his usual scheming lackey role so well, you can see why he is pretty much type cast as this character in the 70's. Special mention should also go to the ever reliable Ga Hoi who does a great job onscreen too. Hoi might not be Sammo Hung but he always puts on a good physical performance and is a welcome addition to any film cast. John Liu also puts on one of his best acting performances. When his character is driven mad his portrayal of a man who's lost his mind is very effective. Especially when you consider he didn't have the same acting training as some other performer in Hong Kong had. I should also mention an impressive shot where Liu holds two terracotta pots in his hands high above his head. Then proceeds to smash them both with his foot.

The film's soundtrack borrows heavily from Bruce Fontiere's excellent *Hang Em High* theme. There's also cues from John Barry's *The Man With Golden Gun* score too. For some time there was another track in the film I could not identify but since joining Kung Fu Fandom that's changed. Just can't recall the person or thread where somebody told me that Ennio Morricone's *Exorcist* score was sampled too. Wish I could credit them by name, so if you are reading this review let us know. The track was Regan's theme by Ennio Morricone which appears in the film a number of times, most notably when Ma's wife meets him by the riverside.

While *Wu Tang Magic Kick* is no masterpiece it's still a very solid old school Kung Fu actioner. Phillip Ko Fei is on top form here playing two great and equally evil roles. It says a lot about an actor's skills when they can still look tough and intimidating whilst wearing a grey rinse wig and matching bushy eyebrows. That's exactly what Ko manages to do here and very effectively too. The one thing the film makers should have done however was give him more screen time. Sadly the two brothers he performs as are given no background at all. Fang Kang just utters to John Liu in an early scene that the towns just not big enough for the two of them. That's the only justification we are given

for what unfolds in the rest of the movie. That said this film still ranks as one of my favorite old school pictures and if you are fan of the cast you should give it a chance.

**Marshes Of Liang Shan Po, The (People's Republic of China, 1984: Ma Shing) - aka Warriors of the Water Margin; Heroes of the Sung Dynasty** - Also known as Warriors Of The Water Margin, the movie may connect to the epic, written work but in reality is so basic and self contained that it's easy to follow without preparation. Rebels are fighting for the people and the rulers want to squash them (centering around a martial arts tournament). Easy enough, well designed, costumed and shot in a grounded way. Meaning there's not an epic, sweeping nature but a rather realistic tone in terms of style. This doesn't generate a cinematic effect though and by the hour point the disconnect to characters and conflict is what's present instead. Backed up by solid martial arts action though (in particular the tournament fights), we get a marginal and competent 90 minutes on offer here. Competence that does not linger however.

**Martial Arts (Hong Kong, 1974: Chui Dai-Chuen)- aka Chinese Mack; Fists Like Lee** - Guess it's fairly obvious from the look of this release, but it's a Bruceploitation film - and a really bad one (though it may still be better than *Bruce Lee Fights Back From The Grave*). The story is about people after a bunch of jewels. Among them are the main villain, a bitch played by Hu Chin (no other way to define that female character, sorry) that works in a casino of some sort and their henchmen on the bad side and a family (the original owners) as well as 2 brothers with one being the Bruce-like for the film on the good side. The "Bruce clone" (played by Chan Wai Man) isn't really the center of focus but the stills of Bruce Lee popping up during his fight scenes are really strange (he also does some imitations of Bruce's attitudes but he is clearly not the best Bruce-like). Naturally, he gets killed later on and well, we all know what happens in *Game Of Death* and *Tower Of Death* after a certain death... The ending fight between the Bruce clone's brother and the bad guy is set in a forrest full of various hunting traps, which is rather unusual. That fight drags though but again, the rest of the movie isn't that interesting either.

The opening credits use archive footage of a public appearance by Bruce Lee (can't tell what event it is though).

**Martial Arts of Shaolin (People's Republic of China, 1986: Lau Kar-Leung) - Martial Arts of Shaolin** is the third and final film in *the Shaolin Temple trilogy* starring Jet Li. Real quick, I'm gonna go over my thoughts on the first two films: **Shaolin Temple** (Jet Li's acting debut) is a great martial arts movie. Beautiful cinematography and extraordinary fight scenes are pluses while the lack of a compelling story and the presence of some really brutal moments bring it down a bit. **Kids From Shaolin** is much more light-hearted and still has some incredible martial arts on display. Unfortunately, again, there's no story. A majority of the film is made up of the hijinks of the kids which are amusing but not terribly engrossing as far as a story is concerned.

**Martial Arts of Shaolin** stars Jet Li as Lin Zhi-Ming, a proud disciple of the Northern Shaolin temple. When he learns that the powerful ruler who killed his parents is having a birthday party, he escapes the temple and sets out to assassinate him. Two other students from Southern Shaolin have the same plan (Woo Gin-Keung and Wong Chau-Yin), but they all fail and become the targets of the ruler's soldiers. A subplot involving an arranged marriage only complicates matters.

I would get more into the story, however, if you've seen the other films in *the Shaolin Temple trilogy*, you already know they don't really have a story. Much like the other films in the trilogy, **Martial Arts of Shaolin** is essentially just a really nice-looking fight-fest. Again, beautiful cinematography and breathtaking martial arts are the highlights. This film displays a terrific martial arts showcase, full of different styles and weapons. The agility and skill of the martial artists (mostly the cast of the first two) just blow me away. Considering this movie is 75% kung fu fight/training scenes, I expected the film to get tiresome after a while. And to be fair, it does a little bit. With films like **The Raid**, I eventually became numbed to the action, but the variety of the weapons and styles used and the sheer talent of these martial artists prevent this movie from becoming flat-out boring.

There are too many action highlights to count in this movie. They're so long and so frequent that choosing a favorite is a difficult task (though not impossible). The "writing game" towards the beginning of the film has some unbelievable choreography. There are so many set-pieces with a lot of variety which make up for the lack of an in-depth story. The extraordinary finale alone is worth the price of admission and all of these fight scenes build up to



an immensely satisfying ending. With Lau Kar-Leung helming these fight scenes, is it really a surprise that they're amazing? Kung fu fans and martial arts enthusiasts should have nothing to complain about.

Unsurprisingly, our three main leads (Jet Li, Woo Gin-Keung, and Wong Chau-Yin) have some exceptional performances as the revenge-thirsty but fun-loving disciples. They all get to show their incredible fighting prowess and are allowed to demonstrate all sorts of styles, weapons, and acrobatics. Besides those three, Yue Hoi returns as the strict abbot. There's also Yu Cheng-Hui as the evil overlord (as usual). Besides these five, it's hard to think of any other memorable characters, but they are somehow easily able to support this movie on their own.

As mentioned earlier, this movie is gorgeous to look at. The amazing landscapes and calming music create a refreshingly upbeat atmosphere throughout. Clearly, a lot of effort was put into this production. Technically speaking, this is probably the best film in the trilogy. The first two, though beautiful still, kinda have a low budget and quickly-made vibe. This film is definitely more polished. I've heard people complain about the music in this movie, saying it's annoying to listen to. But I actually quite like it. It's really hard to explain, but it's kinda a mix of traditional Chinese music with more modern, bubbly 80's music. I feel the music gives this movie a unique atmosphere and adds to the upbeat tone of the film.

However, much like the first two films, this movie could've benefited greatly from a good story. If excellent action scenes are all you care about, then this is the film for you. The amount of variety makes the almost non-stop action easy to watch, but the lack of a story is the main reason why this film isn't as good as it could've been. With such excellent action and absolutely beautiful cinematography, it's almost hard to complain though. As far as other Shaolin-based movies from the 80's from Mainland China, this is definitely one of the better ones.

**Martial Club, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Lau Kar-Leung) - aka Instructors of Death** - Liu Chia Liang is probably more qualified than most to direct a movie based on the character of Wong Fei Hung. After all, he has lineage that can be traced right back to the original as his father was a student of Lam Sai-wing (Butcher Wing), one of Wong Fei Hung's most famous students. Here he provides his own take on the legend in one of his most entertaining movies combining comedy with excellent kung fu action.

The basic premise for the story is quite simple; there are three kung fu schools in Canton and while two of them (the Wong and Chan schools) live in happy co-existence, the third (the Lu school) is always looking for ways to bring the other two down. Against this backdrop of tension a young Wong Fei Hung and his best friend, from the Chan school, find themselves being used as pawns in an attempt by Master Lu to cause disharmony between the two schools. Master Lu also invites a northern kung fu master, Su (Wang Lung Wei), to intimidate masters Wong and Chan further.

Despite being quite a simple plot Liu Chia Liang really fleshes his film out with interesting characters and situations. One of the main set action pieces, a fight scene set in a Chinese theatre, was actually influenced by a true incident although in reality it involved Lam Sai-wing and not Wong Fei Hung.

Again Liu Chia Liang's genius and flair for originality is apparent throughout the film with some excellent and extremely intricate fight sequences. There's a great scene which sees Wong Fei Hung and Master Su pitched in a kung fu stance competition using rolls of fabric. Its ideas such as these that have always kept Liu Chia Liang's films fresh (and way ahead of the competition in my opinion). Most of the fighting features (extremely impressive) hand to hand combat but there are also some good sword, spear and three-sectioned staff sequences. Liu Chia Hui is excellent as the young and mischievous Wong Fei Hung and is provided excellent support from everyone in the cast. Hui Ying Hung and Wang Lung Wei, in a more honourable role than usual, especially look impressive. My only one complaint is that Wilson Tong appears in a fairly substantial role, as Master Chan, but doesn't get to perform any kung fu at all.

It seemed that during his employment at Shaw Brothers, Liu Chia Liang couldn't put a foot wrong and just about every film he made there, including this one, earns the label of 'classic'.

**Martial Hero (Taiwan, 1972: Li Chiu-Ming)** - You could call Martial Hero a cheap Bruce Lee rip off but fear not, it's not an early Bruceploitation (despite lead Yeung Wai credited as Bruce Kong) offering but rather a template being re-used to fine effect. Yeung Wai is Canton boy who runs a noodle stand and decides to TAKE a stand against the injustices forced upon the working people by the oppressing local thugs. High quality power in the bashing-esque choreography follows where little seems unnaturally cranked and a lot seems like a rare breed of quality for a low

budget early 70s production. French VHS print also runs 69 minutes which is in reality probably shorter than original but also suitably perfect for a basic, violent and at times stylish piece of genre offering that in reality probably also honor the impact of a certain Bruce Lee by making an equal picture. Also with Tina Chin Fei.

**Martial Monks of Shaolin Temple (South Korea, 1983: Godfrey Ho)** - I got through watching this one last night, made in the era when Dragon Lee and Hwang Jang Lee were starring together in a slew of Korean productions ('Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger' being the one that immediately springs to mind), it delivers pretty much everything you'd want to see from a movie featuring the pair, making it a solid but unexceptional entry into the genre.

There is plenty of wackiness to enjoy, as is standard with any Korean kung-fu movie. One villain fights with a ridiculously huge sword, while bits of the chicken he was previously eating remain stuck in his fake moustache, another group of villains fire pieces of string from their shoes, Dragon Lee insists to only drink through a sieve which he carries around with him, and in the finale Hwang Jang Lee randomly teleports with no explanation whatsoever. Special mention should also go to Hwang Jang Lee's cape, which is adorned with the image of 2 tigers, 1 on either shoulder.

Surprisingly the movies best fights aren't the finale. Dragon Lee's one on one showdowns against both Cho Min-kyu and Baek Wong-gei are highlights, and Hwang Jang Lee unleashes his kicks against a series of assailants to devastating effect throughout. When Dragon and Hwang finally face off, it's entertaining, however more so because of the goofiness, that see's the likes of Jang Lee being stuck in a barrel, than the fighting on display.

**Marvelous Stunts of Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1979: Chin Sheng-En)** - The movie opens with two killers (Lung Fei and Chang Chi Ping) murdering (after a rigged fight) some guy wearing rags. The movie then centers around a guy (Wang Kuan Hsiung) arriving in a small town and making money by doing jobs for gangs, except he works for all the big gangs in town. He also often bumps into a guy (Ling Yun) and his sister (Ha Ling Ling) who will later be revealed to be the kids of the guy murdered in the beginning and who seek revenge and decided that the newly arrived guy would be fit to fight the two killers who turn out to be doing business with some gangsters from the town.

This one was very confusing at first. The package of my release (the French DVD from FIP, English versions of this film can be found on youtube or on the *Great Impersonators* 12-movie pack from Mill Creek) had a title and a summary that were actually those of Wang Yu's *One Armed Boxer* (What the actual f\*\*k?!), which was kinda bad cause not only is the Wang Yu film a much better one (though *Marvelous Stunts* has grown on me after a few rewatches), but I also expected the lead to have his arm chopped off but it never happens.

Anyway, the movie itself is rather average, though the action and some comedy (notably some slapstick) can be entertaining. I kinda spoiled a lot, but for the best. The opening scene and its link to the main story aren't addressed until the last 10 or so minutes, when we see Lung Fei and Chang Chi Ping return and Ling Yun finally reveals everything to Wang Kuan Hsiung (the fact he and the chick that kept messing around with Wang are siblings, the guy from the opening being their father...). While some of the actors aren't familiar to me, a couple of them really stand out as they seem to show up in a big chunk of Fu flicks from the time: the film has Lung Fei as one of the main baddies, Paul Wei as a gang leader (he's rather funny tbh) and Ma Cheung as a bumbling henchman.

The movie's main animal style is the Golden Chicken Style used by good ol' Lung Fei (as I've stated previously, he seems to pop up in next to every late 1970s Fu film I watch) and Chang Chi Ping. This style is fast, aggressive and has a lot of hand moves but few kicks (essentially low kicks I would add). Being not too versed, I'm not really 100% sure what the Golden Chicken Style is made up of, but some hand moves are reminiscent of Crane fists, and I think some Snake moves are also incorporated. There could be some other animal styles thrown in (Lung Fei jumps a couple of times in a way similar to what Jackie does in *SITES*, though there's a chicken sound effect instead of an angry cat one), I'm pretty sure the lethal two-finger touch (kinda looks like scissors from the rock-paper-scissors game) could be used in some style. But still, the best (or at least funniest) part of the style is the chicken stills and sound effects that randomly pop up during fights.

As far as animal styles, there are also bits of Snake, Leopard and Mantis thrown into the mix. Mantis is used in the beginning and in the end fight against the Golden Chicken fighters (seems to be part of a more elaborate system though it's heavily used in the opening fight - the execution of the style in this fight is really nice, as it looks very threatening and the character uses it to cause damage to his opponents), Snake Fist is used in a comedic sequence

where Wang Kuan Hsiung fights Ma Cheung (who plays a thug working for good ol' Paul Wei). Ma Cheung poorly imitates a Snake pose as his hand is facing the wrong way as he acts like a tough guy. Leopard is used in the first fight between Wang Kuan Hsiung and the main baddies, though it proves of little to no use against the Golden Chicken Style.

**Mask Heroine, The (Taiwan, 1969: Gwan Jing-Leung) - aka The Lady Musketeer** - Although fairly straightforward story-wise, even this aspect is very crude in The Mask Heroine. Certainly you can't expect King Hu-level in every Taiwanese Wuxia pian in the wake of Dragon Inn and in reality the local cinema was still in a kind of infancy. Some productions, especially from Union Films, had the technical know how and drive but smaller ones like Gwan Jing-Leung's 1969 effort fares less well. Or incredibly poorly rather. Featuring a lot of outdoor shooting and indistinct characters, it certainly tries on a small budget to convey the fantasy elements. But through stiff action and pace, few elements have a chance to matter. Also known as The Lady Musketeer.

**Masked Avengers (Hong Kong, 1981: Chang Cheh)** - During waiting this to arrive I was thinking save it for special occasion and when got hold of 88 br, realized that moment is now actually. I tried to watch with english dub but switched to chinese audio after 30 mins..

Masked avengers are vicious bunch of killers who do robbery and contract killing and group of heroes decide to get rid of them. But they have no certain knowledge of whereabouts or ID's of crooks, just a hint where those can be located. And of course they are there and eventually tridents meet hero flesh...

Suspense is in great effect here, unlike in 5 deadly venoms where from the start is obvious who is who, here case quite not so simple. Decent storyline, really awesome action and no weak links in cast makes this best venom movie in my book. Chu Ker and Kuo Chui are particularly excellent in non action scenes also. In fights besides outstanding end my fav moment is chin siu ho vs 3 chiefs.

I have always though HQ of Masked Ones is nicer than *house of traps*. Some nasty stuff there like deadly doors, arrows and acid.

5/5 movie and CCs finest equally with 5 shaolin masters. Can't choose better one of those as they are quite different in style.

**Massacre Survivor, A (Taiwan, 1979: Dung Gam-Woo)** - Rejecting an offer to assassinate a royal and overthrow the dynasty, Kao Jo-Hsueh's (Shih Szu) father and men are massacred and the only survivor is the daughter. Swearing to take revenge, she is put through rigorous training and along the way encounters the Prince of the Eastern Palace (Chung Wa) who becomes an important ally. Dung Gam-Woo's formulaic story is spiced up with intensity and a darkness that is welcome. Rain plays a part and revenge is played up to a very emotional level to the point where Jo Hsueh trusts nothing and no one but her own blood thirsty instincts. A stance that isn't bulletproof. Much of this drama is rather slight though and would've worked better with more of a charismatic star lead. Shih Szu has the fury and beauty in place but not ALL of it. Yuen Cheung-Yan's and Corey Yuen's action delivers expectedly though with multiple, intricate bouts that are at their peak the more outrageous the weaponry becomes. Highlight still remains the always fun genre staple in the form of the training sequences. Also with Lung Fei, Wong Chung, Yuen Cheung-Yan, Corey Yuen and Yuen Yat-Choh.

**Master and the Kid (Taiwan, 1978: Li Fu-Ti)** - A kung fu version of baby cart - sort of, starring Yueh Hua. (NOTE: I have not seen Lone Wolf and Cub, only Shoguns Assassin.) I say sort of because Shoguns Assassin seems to nail the relationship of the kid and his father much better, and is overall a better movie.. But this film has one thing that its inspiration does not, kung fu!

Anyway, the story was OK, very simple and gave way for some great fighting. The lone ranger style is something I always enjoy, and the music selection along with some great locations (ranging from the ocean to the forest)

complimented it well. The fights were plentiful and great as you would expect from Yueh Hua, Phillip Ko, Beardy, and Chen Sing.

Phillip Ko is cool as a bad ass assassin! Chen Sing is our white browed villian (surprise, surprise), and Beardy only gets one fight, but it is a good one. This movie has a dark tone, but the acting isn't great, and the story isn't fleshed out enough for it to matter. The way the villain is killed at the end is awesome though, with a powerful shot of him dangling from a tree!

I actually feel this film could have been great if more attention were given to the plot and acting. The baby cart/kid aspect of it basically just felt like a gimmick in the second half of the movie. During the first half there were some sweet moments between Yueh Hua and the kid, but they amounted to nothing and went to waste. It also would have been nice to see the kid do some badass Daigoro style stuff. There was plenty of acting talent, shit, Yueh Hua is one of the best actors Shaw ever had! Anyway, it felt like a missed opportunity, but many of these films do.

Anyway, I am sure this was a rush job, and it was still a pretty good movie. A decent plot that sort of melts as the movie progresses, great locations and setting, and great fighting. Nice to see Yueh Hua as the lead, he did great. He put on a great fighting performance here as well. Solid kung fu movie with the feeling of a samurai movie.

**Master Killers (Taiwan, 1980: Wang Hung-Chang)** - Blacky Ko and Casanova Wong play long lost brothers who team up to take revenge on the man who killed their father, Phillip Ko. This movie is bad. Bad dub, bad directing, bad story, bad comedy. Bad bad bad. But luckily the fights are superb. While not having a huge cast of amazing talent there are a few heavyweights involved and they put in some of their best work, and are helped by an all star team of action directors, Max Lee, Jacky Chen Shao Lung, Phillip Ko and Blackie Ko. The action is plentiful and gets better as the movie goes along, and the finale is an epic 12 minute fight that I've seen countless times. Phillip Ko fighting the 2 heroes at the same time- check. Casanova Wong doing a lot of spinning and flying kicks- check. Blackie Ko trying too hard to be Jackie Chan- check.

Bolo plays Phillip Ko's henchman and doesn't have a big role.. He performs very well in his 2 fights and does more kicking than usual. I don't know if I'd put this in his top 10 best fighting performances but it's close.

If you are looking at this movie only for Bolo I say get it. If you are a huge kung fu fan I say GET IT!!!!!!

"Empress Fist? You mean a limp wrist."

**Master Of Kung Fu, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Ho Meng-Hua)** - Kwan Tak-Hing, Jet Li, and Jackie Chan have all famously portrayed Chinese folk hero Wong Fei-Hung in their respective film series, but even the most die-hard martial arts film fans may be unaware that esteemed character actor Guk Fung (a.k.a. Ku Feng) essayed the role himself in Ho Meng-Hua's Master of Kung Fu. Released by Shaw Brothers in 1973, the film features a Wong Fei-Hung that isn't quite as charismatic as Li's or as funny as Chan's, but is a force to be reckoned with in his own right.

Haunted by the accidental killing of his own brother, Wong has renounced his "Invisible Kick" and focuses his energies on helping the community. When a European businessman arranges a martial arts competition, Wong's cousin Mai Ken (Shen Chan) enters against Wong's warnings. A nasty competitor named Lee Tian-Dao (Wong Hsia) attempts to kill Mai Ken, and Wong intervenes, exposing Tian-Dao as a cheater. In the process, Master Wong wins back the trust of Mai Ken and tries to nurse him back to health, but wouldn't you know it? IT ALL GOES TO HELL in dramatic fashion. Mai Ken is poisoned, two of Wong's pupils are kidnapped, and the rest of his students are wiped out in fairly quick succession, causing Wong to flee the authorities and take down the criminals all by his lonesome. But will he succeed? Well, he is Wong Fei-Hung, after all.

It's probably safe to say that Wong Fei-Hung films hinge on the performance of their lead actors, and Guk Fung makes for a serviceable, if unspectacular leading man. Although he certainly commands respect as the venerable Master Wong, and is fairly believable in the numerous fight scenes, Guk Fung is fairly unremarkable in the iconic role. Certainly, the film adds a layer of pathos via his continual lamentations over his dead brother, but it's not enough to put Guk's interpretation in the same class as Kwan's, Li's or Chan's.

Similarly, Master of Kung Fu is more or less a formulaic martial arts movie with little spark or sizzle to set it apart from the pack. The closest thing to a potentially iconic scene is Wong Fei-Hung's rain-soaked training sequence late

in the film in which he reclaims his right to the "Invisible Kick" after renouncing it early on. But it's so brief and treated so superficially that one wishes the director would have not only lingered on the scene for a little longer, but actually implemented that kind of visual style in the climactic fight scene. What results in the finished film is no different than what you've seen in B-grade chopsocky films for years.

Comedy-wise, the film contains a silly little interlude involving Wong's disciple, Ah Kwan (Lin Wei-Tu) and the film's token female, the buxom Hong Hua (Chen Ping). A Three's Company-style misunderstanding results in some surprisingly bawdy humor that's sure to elicit at least a chuckle. Although one might expect such a digression to be a bit annoying considering the dire straits in which Wong finds himself, in actuality, the sophomoric goofiness is actually a welcome respite from the film's otherwise stultifying and unnecessarily dour tone.

In the end, a competent performance from Guk Fung and a brief sequence of silly shenanigans don't really add up to good Wong Fei-Hung film. Ho Meng-Hua packs the film with a lot of nice scenery and even utilizes the camera in some interesting ways, but Master of Kung Fu is neither boring nor exciting - it's little more than a workman-like, by-the-numbers production. While it may be worthy viewing for fans of Wong Fei-Hung or the actor Guk Fung, its bland treatment of such a dynamic folk hero leaves much to be desired. (Calvin McMillin 2007)

**Master Strikes, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Kao Pao-Shu, Lim Won-Sick) – aka Super Tiger; Lost Treasure** - Pairing up legendary action choreographer Tony Ching-Siu Tung with one of the most underrated acrobatic kung fu stars Meng Yuen Man already sounds like a recipe for success. But adding super kicker Casanova Wong and a final fight with Yen Shi-Kwan sounds like a masterpiece in the making. But if there's anything *The Master Strikes* teach you, it's that looks can be deceiving.

*The Master Strikes* stars Casanova Wong as a courier who's hired by Yen Shi-Kwan to transport a valuable Jade Horse. He goes on a grueling 17 day journey to deliver the Jade Horse, but upon delivering it, he finds out that it's gone missing. Because of this, he doesn't get paid and has to sell his company to compensate. Perplexed, he heads over to a restaurant where he meets two conmen played by Tony Ching Siu Tung and Meng Yuen Man. Upon hearing Wong's story, they explain to him that Yen Shi-Kwan used basic tricks to con him out of getting paid thousands. Casanova Wong, after suffering from a mental breakdown, teams up with the two in order to find the Jade Horse or at least get their hands on the money for it.

Before continuing, it's important to not that I love light-hearted kung fu comedies, even the crappy ones. A performance by Dean Shek doesn't even make me flinch (most of the time). I can stomach a lot of crap, but for some reason, this movie really gets to me. *The Master Strikes* is possibly the most ear-grating kung fu movies I've ever seen. It was downright annoying at times. I thought since I hadn't seen this movie for a long time, I'd enjoy it more after a rewatch. But, no, it was almost as unbearable to sit through as the first time I saw it. Meng Yuen Man and Tony Ching Siu Tung are always screaming. Meg Lam, who I usually love, was honestly quite irritating. There's also a "comedic" setup in which Casanova Wong is mentally ill, but it came off as more disturbing and uncomfortable than funny. It mainly seems like the writers confused yelling with comedy. It's just a pain to watch.

Does this movie have a saving grace? Well (if you couldn't guess by this month's theme), the action is what makes this movie somewhat bearable to sit through.

If this movie was as good as its action, this movie could've easily become one of the best kung fu movies of all time. The action might be contrived as hell, but that's the way a lot of kung fu fans like it. Take your pick: Realistic and predictable fight scenes or unrealistic and awe-inspiring fight scenes. If you prefer the latter, then this movie delivers in spades. The fight scenes, choreographed by Tony Ching Siu Tung, are very frequent and look amazing. Every time I was about to turn the movie off, I was treated with a fight scene that kept me watching. Tony Ching Siu Tung and Meng Yuen Man get to show off their acrobatics. Casanova Wong's kicking prowess is unbelievable.

The finale in *The Master Strikes* is basically the mother of all final fight scenes. If you like weapons fights, this finale is for you. Hand-to-hand fights? This finale is for you. One-on-one? Brawls? Shapes? Acrobatics? Kicking? No matter who you are, you are bound to get something out of this finale. The choreography is unbelievably fast and intense. Casanova Wong stands out because his energy is infectious and his kicking is cranked to 11. The finale might be one of the best fight scenes of all time. It's creative, complex, and jaw-dropping! The finale is so good that it makes me wish that I actually liked this movie.

Unfortunately though, this is one of those movies where the mute or fast-forward button would come in handy. This movie is sometimes hard to watch since the non-fight scenes are as fun as listening to fingernails on a

chalkboard. But still, the thankfully frequent fight scenes are amazing. And if you're looking for a film with a multitude of excellent fight scenes, then have your remote control ready and enjoy.

**Master Strikes Back, The (Hong Kong, 1984: Sun Chung)** - Very squirm inducing Sun Chung wu xia about corruption and control in Phoenix Town. Ti Lung's Kung Fu master Instructor Tong is brought there to whip the local military into top shape, but his bratty son -Tong Xiao Feng- easily riles up the locals including the awful Chief Constable (Chan Wai Man.) When Xiao Feng is wrongly accused for stealing things go seriously downhill for Ti and his boy. Castration is the method of extreme punishment here and boy is it horrific. These moments are shot with a horror film in mind (the old woman doing the castrating is something out of an Italian Horror film. She's very unsettling to look at.) Props to Sun Chung for making these scenes as repulsive as they had to be.

Of course, the telling moment is when the Chief Constable mentions eye for an eye tactics against Inspector Tong. The ending is justice desserts no doubt. People are reduced to their most base instincts / emotions.

This is the second film where Sun Chung explores corruption and legal justice issues and while it's far more intimate (fewer characters, one location.) It's the one film of Sun Chung's that makes me uncomfortable in how absolutely awful people can be to each other. *The Master Strikes Back* shows the lengths a parent must take to avenge their child. Chan Wai Man really flashes his menacing Cheshire Cat grin here, a visual cue of how rotten a person his Chief Constable was. And like Ti Lung, both men performances get a bit too broad at some points, but it never took me out of the movie.

Not my favorite Sun Chung film because of how consistently unpleasant it is, but it's an interesting piece in his output.

**Master With Cracked Fingers (Hong Kong, 1979: Chin Hsin)** - Jackie Chan got his first starring role in 1973's *The Cub Tiger From Kwangtung*, a movie that didn't crack the earth open and nor did Jackie as a leading man. Fast forward to 1979 and *Master With Cracked Fingers* which right off the bat needs to be said is only enjoyable if you find commercial exploitation fascinating. Jackie broke through the year before and shameless producers unearthed the original basher (that action-wise is not bad at all in short bursts here and there), chucked about half of its footage and began to re-assemble a product bearing themes and content of Jackie's breakthrough films. They hired Simon Yuen to reprise a variation his old master character in *Snake In The Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master* (footage from it pops up briefly too), shot a backstory of Chan's character being trained as a child by the old man, occasionally had Yuen interacting with the old footage (sitting in bushes watching the other movie essentially) and the greatest sin of all, a 15 minute comedy gambling scene with Dean Shek was inserted to bump the local flavour and commercialism. By setting up a fighting technique using a blindfold, an additional finale was conceived with a considerably chunkier Jackie Chan double shot in shadows and with said blindfold (pay attention to the soundtrack in this section too as music from *Zombi 2* and *Dawn of The Dead* is used) and while not in the slightest a good re-take of the largely unknown, original film (it has passable, new action scenes essentially), to stand *Master With Cracked Fingers* you need to almost love the aspect of producers squeezing money out of a hot thing. Distributed in the US as *Snake Fist Fighter* with a hilarious trailer featuring audience testimonials, the transparency is marvelous and surreal. Almost to the point of admiration. Almost.

**Matching Escort (Taiwan, 1982: Pearl Cheung Ling, Si Ma-Peng)** - aka: **Wolf Devil Woman 2; Phoenix the Ninja; Wolfen Ninja; Fury of the Silver Fox** - The first "follow-up" to *Wolf Devil Woman* doesn't have the supernatural elements that the previous film does, but it's just as over-the-top violent and is crazy in its own way, and even better in some respects. The problems with pacing that marred Pearl Chang's "masterpiece" are largely absent (save an unnecessary six-minute comic interlude involving Pearl and a group of beggars) and the action sequences are spaced at more uniform intervals, although things kick into overdrive during the last 30 minutes. Pearl continues as director and star, although writing and producing duties have been relegated to others, which is probably for the best. And once more, the overarching theme of the movie is "Don't kill Pearl Chang's parents, because she \*will\* get bloody revenge on you."

So there's a kung fu noble by the name of Fang who lives in quiet solitude with his household, including his young daughter, Chu (who'll be played as an adult by Pearl Chang Ling herself). Chu grows up forced to wear heavy metal shoes, which strengthen her legs to the point that, by the time she reaches adulthood, she can fly, jump high into trees, and even run on water! Her father is visited by some men one day who ask him to join their cause in

dethroning the emperor. He turns down the offer, leading the men to say, "Screw that!" and murder the entire household. Only Chu is able to escape, thanks to her flying skills.

Chu becomes a vagabond, but unlike women who dress like that in most kung fu movies, the villains are still able to see through the disguise and are on her tail. During one chase sequence, Chu falls off a cliff and into a secret cave! The cave is inhabited by a former kung fu clan leader who was violently betrayed by his own twin brother. For twenty years he has been mixing concoctions from the giant mushrooms and flowers that grow in the cave, with the hope of making a potion that'll restore his broken legs and allow him to get his revenge. The man eventually agrees to become Chu's teacher and she learns not only kung fu, but is subjected to various poisonous plants and vapors that render her immune to the effects of most poisons. That's an oddly specific kung fu ability, you know. I can't possibly imagine it coming in handy later.

At the end of Chu's training, her master conveniently expires, leaving her to take revenge for the both of them. Not conveniently, they don't happen to be looking for the same person, so we get an extra action sequence with the purpose of wrapping up that particular subplot involving her master. Chu then teams up with the 3rd Prince (Meng Fei) and his servant, Peanut (I suppose having a Chinese name that translates to Peanut is more plausible than being a Ming Dynasty Chinese named "Rudy"), to dish out the kung fu revenge that only an angry woman with a sword can deal out.

So no zombies, ghosts or voodoo dolls in this movie, but we do get lots of people being slashed to ribbons with Pearl's sword. The fight choreography was provided by Su Chen-Ping, who worked on a few obscure Taiwanese movies during the 70s, and is probably best known by fans for *King of Fists and Dollars*. I suspect he also worked on *Wolf Devil Woman*, since both films have that same proto-*Butterfly and Sword* approach to choreography: lots of flips, quick cuts, wires, and the like. Don't expect much hand-to-hand from Meng Fei. He usually just wacks people with his fan until the end, when he also whips out his sword and slices his way through a literal army of ninja. Speaking of ninja, Pearl's sword style in this movie is heavily influenced by Japanese chambara movies. Except for the final duel against a villain who wears a Nintendo Power Glove, the fights are over very quickly. Chang whips out her sword (gotta love how her scabbard also has a blade at the tip), twirls it around a little bit, parries an attack or two, twirls it around some more, and then several people just keel over dead with blood spurting out of God knows where. I'm assuming that Pearl's martial arts background was a little limited, so this approach to swordplay is probably a best fit for her skills.

So if you want to see a lot of bloody swordplay and Pearl Chang Ling learn kung fu inside a cave full of giant papier mâché flowers from a guy who does backflips but is unable to actually walk, then *Matching Escort* is the film for you.

**Mean Streets Of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1973: Yang Tao) - Aka The Invincible Hero** - Mean Streets Of Kung Fu won't turn heads through its low budget or leading man Barry Chan but at least with the early 70s you could depend on comedy not interrupting matters. So the standard story has gloom and darkness, leading to sporadic bursts of powerful and gritty martial arts action. Worth sticking around for even though the passages in between are familiar in a rather bad way.

**Men from the Gutter (Hong Kong, 1983: Lam Nai-Choi)** - Two policemen, one by the book, the other by any means necessary, try to topple a drug kingpin. A hitman who is also after the dealer for a past vendetta, gets mixed up with the two cops amidst his trail of revenge.

A late new wave entry from Shaw Brothers when they were crumbling from the massive crippling their long time rival Golden Harvest had administered with their modern style thrillers and jaw droppingly dangerous stunt filled movies. By the time Shaw's had began experimenting with new wave cinema styles, it was too late. It's a shame, because this is a damn fine, gritty crime thriller with some surprisingly dangerous stunts that rival almost anything that Jacky Chan, Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao were doing over at Golden Harvest.

My favorite HK actor and one of the original 5 DEADLY VENOMS, Lo Mang, plays the hot-headed police Sergeant out to bust a local drug lord who runs his operations from a high rise in HK's business district. But his level-headed superior (played by Mu Kwei Wai) wants to take the criminal kingpin (played by Wong Yung) down legally. Later in the film, the good cop realizes that you can't always go by the book when dealing with vicious crooks and thugs.

Frequent kung fu actor Jason Pai Piao plays the supposedly dead hitman who has returned from Thailand to settle the score with the crime boss and his cohorts (one of which is played by screen heavy Li Hai Sheng). Pai Piao obviously pumped up a bit for this movie and during the action packed 20 minute stunt filled shoot-out, Pai reminds me a lot of Bronson from DEATH WISH 2. Also, it appears Pai has gone the extra mile and done most, if not all his own stunts. Several of them are extremely impressive. Pai pretty much steals the movie from everyone else and he takes a load of punishment throughout the movie. You really want to see him kill the bad guy.

Lo Mang doesn't get quite as much screen time as I would have liked, but Pai Piao more than makes up for it with his performance. I've always liked him as an actor and although I kind of feel he was dwarfed by the magnificence of the venoms in SHAOLIN RESCUERS (1979), Pai owns this movie and really blew me away with his tortured, revenge seeking character. This is easily the best of the few crime films from Shaw's I've seen including the likes of BROTHERS FROM THE WALLED CITY (1982) and PURSUIT OF A KILLER (1985). It seems many of these later Shaw Brothers movies start out like gangbusters but have weak finishes. Not so with MEN FROM THE GUTTER (1983). A top crime drama from beginning to end.

There is also a subplot involving some young punks and their criminal exploits to get rich quick and stow away for America. It all ends badly for them during an exciting car chase and bang up. One of two such scenes. This subplot is very reminiscent of the violent Italian crime movie YOUNG VIOLENT & DANGEROUS (1976). Chen Pei-Hsi (5 ELEMENT NINJAS 1982) is almost unrecognizable as the ill-fated girlfriend of one of the young thugs.

There is so much going on in this movie. The bravura 20 minute action set piece in the warehouse is worth the DVD alone. It's a shame the movie going public in HK had, by this time, turned their backs on Shaw Brothers movies deeming them old-fashioned. The same thing having happened to Hammer a few years prior. This movie grossed around 3 million in HK while stunt-laden comedy films from Chan, Hung and Biao (PROJECT A for example released the same year) were grossing around 15-20 million.

This film did win an award at the 28th Annual Asia Pacific Awards for Best Editing. If you're in the mood for something completely different from the usual kung fu opus or if you're an Italian crime movie fan than you should definitely see this film.

**Men from the Monastery (Hong Kong, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - 1974 Chang Cheh "Shaolin cycle" movie about the lives of three Chinese folk heroes (Fong Sai Yuk, Hung Hsi-Kwan, and Wu Wai Kin) who get involved in anti-Qing activities. The format of the film is that it shows the "backstory" of each of the three individually (each getting around 15-20 minutes of screen time), followed by their adventures following the burning of Shaolin. What should've been an epic film is not, and each segment seems rushed enough that the film never was compelling. However, it does feature a fighting female, which is uncommon in a Chang Cheh movie, and the action direction is pretty good for its time. Oh, one of the characters gets killed by taking a sword up a most unpleasant place.

**Middle Kingdom Mark of Blood (Taiwan, 1979: Siu Muk)** - A great fighter nicknamed "Mark of blood" (Ling Yun) and another great fighter have decided to fight in a duel in order to know who is the best and several noble men have placed money on each on them. The problem is that nobody knows where Ling Yun hides and that the date of the duel is near...

Tien Ho is Ling Yun's friend and he goes to search for him, with one of his friend's (called Hu Tieh Hua in the movie) help. Both of them have to fight against Ling Yun's enemies and they are helped by Doris Lung, whose father has been murdered by someone who uses a fake Ling Yun's skill.

During their search, they discover that Ling Yun's adversary has been hurt and poisoned and Ling Yun cures him, telling him that he doesn't want to fight with him.

Finally, there is the duel and Ling Yun, Tien Ho, Doris Lung and Hu Tieh Hua discover that all the murders were done by an evil monk who wanted to get rid of both Ling Yun and his adversary. That's a very good movie, with great fights, which reminds Gu Long's novels. Worth to watch.



**Mighty Couple (Hong Kong, 1971: Ng Tan)** - Fung Bo Bo and her mother are escaping in the forest but the mother is very tired and can't go on so, FBB lets her in the forest and runs to ask for help. In a house she finds a man and a young boy and asks them to help her mother. They first refuse to help her, but finally, they go and let her in the house.

On a table, there is a flag with a portrait of Shih Kien, who, as usual in these old movies from the 60's, plays an evil bandit who kills without any remorse. Suddenly, there is a storm followed by a calm period, and Shih Kien and his men appear and ask her for the owner of the house. As she tells them that she doesn't know where he is, they beat her and they finally go to where she left her mother, only to discover that this one is dead. While she is making the grave for her mother, FBB meets a young lady who can appear and disappear as she wants and she helps her to bury her mother. Then, the young lady's master appears and he accepts to take FBB as his disciple.

Later, the two young disciples save a family from Shih Kien's evil men and they go with them in a house where FBB recognizes the man who cheated her and didn't save her mother. She wants to kill him, but a man doesn't let her to do that and she recognizes her father.

Later, they are all attacked by Shih Kien and his men and there's a big fight.

Very amazing warriors in this movie : they can go through the walls, fly, disappear and appear as they wish to, become microscopic or keep their normal height, run as fast as the bionic man...Good story and fights too, worth watching.

**Mighty Four, The (South Korea, : Cheng Kay Ying)** - Orphaned as a young boy Casanova Wong spends his formative years learning kung fu with one objective in mind; to get revenge against the four men who murdered his parents. Its not an easy task though and his first attempt ends in failure. A few training sessions later and he's ready to try again but this time with the help of his kung fu master and a female fighter.

The action offers little new in the way of choreography but features a good kicking performance, not only from the main star but also from the supporting cast. At times the fight scenes seem to be dominated by spinning kicks but there's also some interesting weaponry to offer a bit of variety.

The film does suffer from budget restrictions but this provides for some of the most entertaining moments such as the crazy wirework where people are thrown through the air just a bit too slowly. Or there's the bit where Casanova Wong catches throwing stars in his teeth, or the killers that wear papier machet helmets. But the best of all is when Casanova repeatedly kicks down on the head of a victim to knock him into the ground. None of this is done in a way that could remotely realistic.

**Mighty One (Hong Kong, 1971: Joseph Kuo)** - Evil kung fu master is after manual which contains last moves of famed "mighty creed" and obviously killing others is not big deal in process. After leaving girl as orphan and boy without teacher it's time to jump in movie some years later and manual is still not found but revenge is coming for evildoer...

One of "hidden gems" definitely, Joseph Kuo directed exciting martial arts adventure. Some heroes and villain have telekinetic powers, wires are used but not over the top and martial arts action is very good, superior than in most other wu xia pian movies of early 70's. Ivy Ling Po and Ling Yun are excellent and rest of cast decent too.

**Ming Patriots (Taiwan, 1976: Ulysses Au)** - aka: **Revenge of the Patriots** - Following the passing of Lau Kar-Leung, I've decided to do a two-part review session, tackling two of his most obscure 70s films, a pair of mercenary jobs he did in Taiwan between '76 and '77. To be honest, he worked on at least three independent films as action director during that period, but one of them is so famous today that there's nothing new I could possibly add to the dozens of reviews floating around on the internet. That film, my friends, is none other than *Master of the Flying Guillotine*. But since that film gets enough attention as it is, I thought I'd look into two movies he did with prolific kung fu director Ulysses Au.

*Ming Patriots* is a fairly standard entry in the Ming Patriot (natch) vs. Manchu dogs sub-genre, which had already gotten overstuffed with entries by 1976, despite having really taken off only two years earlier. The movie opens with the Qing Prince (Chang Yi of *The Victim*) ordering his men to seal off the city so that his forces can capture the last living Ming Princess (Cheung Kam, an adorable actress who showed up in *The Snake Woman's Marriage*), her father's will, and the crown jewels. The princess is in the custody of her teacher, Wu (Ma Chi), and a loyal general (*Big Trouble in Little China's* Carter Wong). The three try to escape via disguising themselves as peasants, but the Princess doesn't disguise herself thoroughly enough and the whole ruse is ruined. Cue a big kung fu fight. Exit the General.

Enter Ti Lung (the name of the character, not the actor, who'll be played by Jimmy Ho Chung-Tao, better known by B-movie fans as Bruce Li), a retired escort. Wu and the Princess show up at his house and ask him to accompany them to the west. He's initially reluctant, but decides to go when he remembers that Wu and his late father were close friends. Ti Lung and his partner (Lung Fong of *The Rebellious Reign*) escort the two, but are quickly cornered by the Qing soldiers. A fight breaks out (of course) and our heroes escape.

Ti Lung figures that the Qing forces are too much for just two men to handle and he's right; Partner Boy is sort of a martial pushover and Ti Lung is bereft of the mad fighting skills that come with being played by a Bruce Lee imitator. Ti decides to enlist the help of his sister (Judy Lee, one of the original kung fu divas), who's working at a cook at an inn. Unfortunately, the inn is being run by an old romantic and professional rival of Ti Lung's (Michael Chan Wai-Man, a real-life Triad who used to smoke weed with Bruce Lee back in the day). Rival Dude initially thinks that Ti Lung is there to hit on his wife, but quickly figures out that he's carrying some especially valuable cargo. His wife (Joh Yim-Yung, who showed up in films like *The Beggar and the Pretty Prostitute*) despite having loved Ti Lung at some point, likes the idea of getting rich quick and has no moral objections to joining forces with the Qing in exchange for the jewels. Cue fight scene at the inn. Exit Teacher Wu, who gets beaten to death during the scuffle.

Since both the will and the jewels are of the utmost of value to our heroes, they decide that they need to protect them somehow. In a scene that would make Ruggero Deodato proud, the heroes buy a pig, kill it, gut it (onscreen), and stuff it with the jewels. They then float it downstream and resolve to pick it up at another point along the way. When the bad guys, including Rival and his wife, capture our heroes, the latter simply tell them that they're waiting for their contact, a fellow named Porky. My sides hurt. Anyways, there are several more fights, a few more deaths, and a final showdown between the good guys and the Prince, who's so powerful that four people need to gang up on him in order to kill him.

I'm going to guess that Lau Kar-Leung was hired to direct the action and not much else. That would technically make him the film's choreographer, as opposed to action director. Choreographers simply arrange the fights. Action directors play a more integral role in deciding what direction the film will go in, working closely with the real director and supplying ideas on how to do certain scenes. None of Lau's ideas and cinematic martial philosophies show up in this movie. There is no deconstruction different kung fu styles or meditations on the strengths and weaknesses of each. There's no illuminating moments in which the actors come to the conclusion that killing isn't the ultimate goal of fighting. There's no character development in the form the characters learning to adapt their fighting styles in order to overcome an external obstacle. It's just people killing the Manchus for 90 minutes.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with that in and of itself. The problem is that there's nothing to show that Lau Kar-Leung really worked on the choreography. While made a year before Lau would settle into his groove of making a genre masterpiece every two movies, he had made *Challenge of the Masters* and *Master of the Flying Guillotine* that same year and those had superior fight scenes, even if the former wasn't that great as a whole. The weapons fights are rather standard and the styles on display aren't all that impressive, save some brief hung gar from Carter Wong and Chang Yi's mantis style, which he has done better in other films. Judy Lee looks great, but she was more impressive in films like *Iron Swallow* and *The Crane Fighters*. In fact, Judy's energetic fighting and bad-ass persona are what make the movie watchable during most of its running time. Nonetheless, the fighting here is nothing that the likes of Taiwanese regulars like Chan Siu-Pang or Chan Muk-Chuen could pull off.

What's really strange is just how much of a loss Lau Kar-Leung and his brother, Kar-Wing, are at dealing with Ho Chung-Tao/Bruce Li. Jimmy Ho had lots of training in the *wing chun* style, plus a few others so that he could kick decently. However, the cheap films he showed up in often had subpar fight choreography and failed to show off his skills adequately. You'd think that Lau Kar-Leung, a master of Southern styles, could milk Ho's skills for all they were worth and come out with something impressive. Unfortunately, that's not the case and Ho's fighting is the most bland on display in the film. He uses no definitive styles and doesn't show off any impressive moves. Viewers should check out *Dynamo* and the kung fu-slasher film *The Black Dragon Strikes Again* for better showcases from Jimmy Ho.

The only moments of creativity in the action come in the form of a drunken master, two years before Jackie Chan and the Yuens made those characters famous; and the fact that the villain is a snuff addict, which the heroes end up using to their advantage during the final fight. Everything else is pretty paint-by-numbers and when all is said and

done, *Ming Patriots* is one of the least impressive films on Lau Kar-Leung's résumé, especially by the standards of 1976.

**Miracle Fighters (Hong Kong, 1982: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - This film is the first in a series of four (five if you count *Drunken Tai Chi*) film directed by, choreographed by, and starring members of the Yuen Clan. By the Yuen Clan, I mean the sons of Simon Yuen, who are among the greatest action directors in world cinema. They are Yuen Woo Ping, Yuen Cheung Yan, Yuen Shun-Yi, Yuen Yat-Chor, and Brandy Yuen. Now, what separates these four films from most everything else they did is that the films revolve not around kung fu (although there is a good helping of it), but Taoist sorcery. Thus, here we have one of those films that mixes comedy, magic, and expertly-done martial arts in entertaining proportions.

The movie starts off with Kao (Eddie Ko, *Hitman in the Hand of Buddha*), the Emperor's martial arts trainer, being condemned for marrying a Han (Chinese) woman. After his wife is executed, he goes on the warpath and starts killing the emperor's guard, and is ready to kill the emperor. However, the court's sorcerer, Sorcerer Bat (Yuen Shun-Yi, *Dance of the Drunk Mantis*), shows up and flees with his majesty, leaving Kao to fight a white-faced kid in a jar armed with a paper sword. Surviving that fight, Kao takes the Emperor's young son hostage and is able to escape. Unfortunately, he squeezes the young prince to tightly and suffocates him. Kao finds an orphan and raises him as if he were the prince.

Some years later, Kao is a drunk living in poverty with Shu Gun (Yuen Yat-Chor, *In the Line of Duty IV*), the kid he adopted. Kao is finally discovered by the Court's assassins, who try to kill him and bring Shu Gun back to the palace. They fail, but Kao is blinded in the process. Shu Gun goes looking for medicine and finds it at the house of two quarreling magicians, a brother (Leung Kar-Yan, *My Life is on the Line*) and a sister (Yuen Cheung-Yan, choreographer of *Charlie's Angels* and *Daredevil*). The brother gives Shu Gun the medicine and tells him to return if he should ever need it.

Shu Gun restores Kao's sight, but the Sorcerer Bat soon shows up and kills Kao. Discovering that Shu isn't the prince, the Sorcerer Bat uses his black magic to put the birth marks of the prince on his foot, in order to return him to the Court and get promoted, so that he may take over the world (if he's such a master sorcerer, why doesn't he just murder everybody in the court and take the place over?). Shu is able to escape and makes his way back to the house of the two magicians, where he's accepted as their younger brother, and thus begins to learn kung fu and magic with them...

Yeah, that accounts for a little more than half the film, and only a little bit of the craziness on display. This is one of those films that you want to describe more as a list of crazy things, rather than put it into paragraphs. As a film, you want to criticize the fact that in the last reel, the Sorcerer Bat seems to abandon his plan of using the fake prince to get power and is more intent on beating Shu Gun at the wizardry competition. You want to complain that there isn't more kung fu on display. The fact of the matter is, there's so much weird stuff to see that you can't help but be entertained by it all.

Let's see, we have a ghost-in-a-jar with a paper sword. There's a fight gag where the brother magician retracts his head into his body and a hand with an eye in the middle appears where his head should be. There's the sister magician and her HUGE FRIGGIN' AXE. There's the Blair Witch kung fu stick man at the film's climax. There's a paper bridge over a snake pit that Shu Gun has to cross. There's a lot more where that came from.

The martial arts is restricted to the opening fights between Eddie Ko and the emperor's guard and the final duel between Shu Gun and the Sorcerer bat. The choreography is as solid as anything else that bears the Yuen Clan seal and even as early as 1982, you can see their natural talent for enhancing action with wires in a way that makes things creative, but without substituting actual talent. Pity there wasn't more.

I think I like *Shaolin Drunkard* better, with its crazy ring fu, kung fu frog, and bamboo tank...but I enjoyed this one a bit and even laughed out loud a few times. For those of you who need a good WTF injection, go with this film.

**Miraculous Flower (Taiwan, 1981: Fong Ho)** - aka: **Phoenix the Ninja; Wolf Devil Woman 3** - Much like *Matching Escort*, this movie is more of a conventional wuxia pian with a few moments of total bizarreness and graphic violence to keep things original. It's considered the third movie in Chang Ling's Wolf Devil Woman "trilogy," although it predates the first two movies by a year. However, on the version I watched, which was ripped from an Ocean Shores VCD, it was picked up for distribution a year after those two movies, which would probably explain the difference in titling. It was also picked up at some point by IFD films for distribution, thus gaining the title *Phoenix the Ninja*. *Wolf Devil Woman* and *Matching Escort* had also gotten some degree of distribution from IFD,

and were given ninja titles as well. This movie is easily the least "ninja" of the trilogy, since there is but one masked assassin who shows up during a fight in the second act. But that's neither here nor there.

We begin with a young woman named Leng dragging the body of her mother through the snow. As she does so, we're treated to some flashbacks of the girl's mother giving her instructions prior to her passing, which includes:

- Looking for the Happy Fairy;
- Retrieving a box at the top of Mount Ermei;
- Burning the walking stick she's carrying afterward.

At some point, Leng ditches the body and heads into town, where she meets a wandering scholar named No-Stain (Chung Wah). The two strike up a friendship and he offers his father's estate to Leng as a new home. She turns him down and continues on her journey. While sleeping in the ruins of an old house, she overhears some men planning a raid on No-Stain's home. She sneaks away and warns the household in time for them to protect themselves against the forces of the spear-wielding Lonely Fly. To show his gratitude, No-Stain's father takes on Leng as an adopted daughter.

While living with her new family, Leng discovers that No-Stain is actually a martial artist. He teaches her some palm techniques and how to fly, which will come in handy later. She eventually leaves the home and resumes her search for the Happy Fairy. Reaching Mount Ermei, Leng finds the box, but loses it and the walking stick to a hooded thief. She then meets the Happy Fairy, who teaches her kung fu and tells her the story of her family. Leng is actually May, the daughter of a martial arts noble who was murdered by a number of conspirators who wanted his signature weapon, the Bowel-Cutting Blade. May recovers the blade and finds the list of conspirators in the box, which the Happy Fairy was hiding. She sets out to avenge the murder of her family...again.

*Miraculous Flower* is bereft of much of the irritating comedy that marred *Matching Escort* and *Wolf Devil Woman*. Because of that, Pearl Chang's character is a lot more tolerable and likable during the non-fighting scenes. The story is pretty conventional wuxia stuff and Chang Ling is once more out for vengeance, even if it's not clear from the outset (well, sort of). There's talk of the martial world and different groups fighting for supremacy, but many of the villains show up almost only to fight Pearl Chang and be killed almost immediately. That would probably be the major flaw in the story, plus the film stops before we learn what exactly the final fate of our heroine is. I do like that the script combines the exposition sequences with the training sequences, which is a far more economical mode of storytelling.

There's quite a bit of action, which is of the same standard as the other movies. It's not exactly at the level of the Chang Cheh-directed *Venom Mob* wuxias made at the same time, but it's fine for what it is. There are lots of wire tricks and swordplay, with a few villains wielding weapons like assault blades and spears to give the action a little more variety. The most unforgettable sequence is the finale, which is set inside of a collapsing magma chamber (shades of *Star Wars Episode III*) against a monk who rips his own guts out at one point. If you can find another movie where that happens, I'd certainly like to know!

**Mission for the Dragon (South Korea, 1980 – Kim Si-Hyun) - aka Rage of the Dragon aka Cheer** - Directed by frequent Dragon Lee collaborator Kim Si-hyun, of *Enter the Invincible Hero* and *Martial Monks of Shaolin Temple* fame, *Mission for the Dragon* is a Korean movie which gives us the unusual pairing of Dragon Lee and Carter Wong. In 1980 Lee was in the prime of his popularity, while Wong was already an industry veteran, having started his career in Korea shot HK productions such as *Hapkido* and *When Taekwondo Strikes*. How Wong found himself taking part in a Korean production at this point in his career is a mystery to me, but he's there!

This is the type of movie that opens with someone getting punched in the face, which is always a good sign. The puncher is Choi Min-kyu, who seemingly has featured in every Korean kung-fu movie ever made. Lee and Min-kyu are both trying to get to the bottom of their respective fathers' apparent murders, with Min-kyu sure that Lee had something to do with it. Wong plays a suspicious looking detective, who has a strange aversion to sunlight which requires him to wear sunglasses whenever he's outside, and keep everything in darkness when he's inside. It's an interesting character quirk, however it's never explained. Having watched these movies for a while now though, I never expected it to be.

There's an element of horror thrown in when it appears the killer is some kind of cave dwelling kung-fu goblin, who has a face that resembles something akin to the dwarf killer from 'Don't Look Now'. This horror element is thrown

out later on when a revelation reveals that all is not what it seems, but for a chunk of the runtime the mysterious goblin definitely keeps things interesting.

Dragon Lee seems to be in full on wild mode here, preceding every fight by busting out several poses while frantically shaking his head from side to side, his intensity is amusing to watch. The choreography here though is not up to the usual standards of a Si-hyun/Dragon Lee collaboration, with many of the fights featuring choreography that seems to have the performers 1 or 2 steps out from each other. Sometimes moves clearly don't connect, the punches and kick are thrown a little too slowly, or worse don't seem to really serve any purpose. At one point Lee looks like he's fighting with air rather than the person he should be facing off against. There's also a lot of frame jumping, which adds a certain old-school charm to it, but when you know Lee can do more, it becomes a distraction.

The fights also feature a bizarre array of sound effects, consisting of various bleeps and bleeps, so much so that if you were to close your eyes during one of the fight scenes, it would probably sound like you're watching an old episode of 'Star Trek'. The finale does give us the match up of Dragon Lee versus Carter Wong, by which point Lee has donned his faithful white t-shirt. The finale is a let down in terms of the fight action itself, with Wong and Lee looking to not really be a good match in terms of complimenting each others styles. However it does get points for some unintentional amusement, as just before the fight Lee takes out a group of Wong's lackeys. In most kung-fu movies that would be the end of them, but here, his fight against Wong lasts so long that the lackeys regain consciousness, and Lee has to fight them again! By the time he's through with them for a second time, Wong has had a change of wardrobe, just to add to the nonsensical nature.

All in all, 'Mission for the Dragon' is an entry into Dragon Lee's filmography that can safely be given a miss.

**Mission Kiss And Kill (Taiwan, 1979: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Twists, tricks and deception populate Lee Tso-Nam's martial arts movie with the lead in to the escort mission involving almost killing off Lu (Lee I-Min) as a test of bravery being one of the more far fetched ones. It is a fair delight to follow Lee, Blacky Ko and the daughter of the Chin Jing castle carrying the 8 Jade Horses and having ambushes come at them left and right though. Leading to both quality martial arts but also creative scenarios such as a fight on top of empty wine jars. Light but not dominated by comedy is a plus too. Also with Lung Fei.

**Monkey Fist (Hong Kong, 1974: Suen Ga-Man)** - Run of the mill basher about local conflicts with army and influential evil (Sek Kin) struggles for the first hour but unleashes some very intense fighting during the last half hour that re-emphasizes that some genre entries can survive on the genre's most famous inclusion. Especially impressive since several years pass and there's several main subjects as our good guys and not just Chan Sai-Chung's character who passes on the titular monkey fist.

**Monkey Fist, Floating Snake (Taiwan, 1979: Joe Law)** - A helpless young waiter after being abused by the locals is seeking a kung fu master. After finding out the local barber is a kung fu expert he follows him around until the barber agrees to teach him kung fu. After the barber finally agrees to teach him, the young waiter finds out he's also an expert in Monkey Fist kung fu.

This movie started off pretty fair with one of those kung fu displays during the credits, just a taste of what's to come and I really liked the song that was played during. (as seen in vidclip\_01) Though the star of this movie's portrayal of the Monkey Fist technique looks like he has a nervous twitch, it's still always entertaining to watch. I think there were about 2 scenes that didn't really make much sense on what was going on in the movie, they seemed out of place and should have been edited out. If you watch this movie I'm sure you'll notice them as well. The person playing "the barber/the master" had 2 obviously blacked out front teeth which I didn't really care for but he also had a cool "silver fox" type wig. One cheesy thing that I thought was really cool, was how the main villain could be chasing somebody from behind, then the camera would show only his feet in motion and he has magically passed the person he was chasing and is now standing a few feet in front of them. LOL. Too Cool.

Comedy? .. Yes ... was it funny? .. Not really. Well there was only one aspect of this movie that was funny and that was a character who comes of like he's some sort of Super Hero stating he is the "king of all fighters". He ask people to test him so he could show them how good he is and right when they are ready to take a punch he says "hold on" and makes up some excuse why he can't fight them and takes off. It might sound dumb, well actually it sort of is .. but it was still funny. (as seen in vidclips\_03 and 05) A lot of the characters featured in this film along with the star

just acted way too goofy. The main villain of the film was serious all the time, which should be a must in order to play a villain in the first place.

The fighting in this movie is average at best. Very simple and basic moves, nothing complex or creative at all. The Monkey Fist technique shown in this movie really was some of the worst I have seen so far in an old school kung fu movie, not even close to the style shown in the Shaw Bros classic "Mad Monkey Kung Fu". I think there were a total of 2 fights that actually were entertaining in this film and that was between the main villain and "the barber".

The standout performance of this movie was by a guy barely seen, the one who thought he was a kung fu super hero. Reason being cause it was obvious he was trying to be funny and was supposed to make people laugh, and he succeeded ... well at least with me.

Ok, if you are a lover of the Monkey Fist technique and just have to see all movies that feature it.... then I would have to say Rent It. If you have a buttload of money and want some "filler" movies to build up your collection and also because this movie is fairly pretty cheap ... then Buy It. If you don't want to waste time watching any movie that is BELOW average in kung fu action .... then Pass!

**Monkey Wife (1982)** - Yueh Hua is a doctor who marries a Japanese woman. One day, he saves a young girl (Cui Cui) who fell in the water and she becomes a nurse in his cabinet. As she ate fishes' eyes when she was a little girl, the nurse has a super power and she can see through clothes and walls and thus, she helps Yueh Hua in his diagnosis, and he finally falls for her, but his wife wants to kill her and she has to escape and returns to her district, where she is helped by her neighbours, who chase the killer away.

Yueh Hua's friend Ta Yü meets a girl (Mei Ha) impersonating a boy and they go to Cui Cui's district, where they meet her and her father (if I'm not mistaken ; if he is not her father, it's a neighbor and he lives with a monkey looking like Tarzan's Cheetah) and Ta Yü seems to be interested in Cui Cui, which makes Mei Ha very jealous. It appears that at night, Mei Ha is turned into a monkey and that she kills men and when she attacks Ta Yü and Mei Ha, they have to escape.

They fall from a cliff and are prisoners of a woman who lives with monkeys and is the godmother of Yueh Hua's wife. She wants to marry Ta Yü for some reason and she is beaten by a kind of exorcist and seeks help from her monkeys in order to kill the couple, and they are saved by the man who lives with a monkey.

There's a big fight between the woman living with monkeys and Mei Ha and they both fall from a cliff and die, and Ta Yü is devastated, but Cui Cui wants to comfort him, but with her super powers, she discovers that Yueh Hua (who she believed to be dead) is actually prisoner of his own wife in a cave and she goes to the cave in order to save him.

Yueh Hua quarrels with his wife and tells her that he only loves Cui Cui, but when this latter appears, the wife commits suicide after telling Yueh Hua that she is pregnant and Yueh Hua becomes mad and finally dies, and Cui Cui returns with Ta Yü.

Well, that's a strange horro movie and I didn't really fully understand the plot. And it was so strange to discover Yueh Hua playing such a timorous character, being hit and cheated by his wife when one is used to see him as chivalrous fighters! The song is good, as well as the big fight between the two women.

**Monk's Fight, The (Taiwan, 1979: Yu Kong)** - ALMOST way too stuffed and unacceptable Taiwanese Wuxia pian, this Pearl Cheung vehicle (she really shares the spotlight with Lee Wing) goes from seemingly spiritual to an escalating revenge affair. Both good and bad people lose close ones in this battle but there's no tension or fine lead up to a great battle. It's packed and often disorienting as a whole but scenes and concepts on an individual basis shows a higher strength. The Monk's Fight has plenty of cinematic cool on a budget, some fine action and gore (an assassination of several characters during temple prayer is well done) but extracting bits that work don't add up to a fine whole. Also with Casanova Wong.

**Moon Night Cutter (Taiwan, 1980: Hsu Yu-Lung)** - High on style and spectacle but not coherency, Hsu Yu-Lung does adhere to Wuxia pian tradition by packing his frame with characters, twists and developments, something that in the case of this viewer often becomes an impenetrable mess and Moon Night Cutter doesn't get any easier as it goes along. But setting aside that, the stern and even bleak atmosphere coupled with a ton of bursts into high flying

swordplay and cool style makes the exercise alluring to follow despite critically it deserving a huge slam. Starring Ling Yun, Wong Goon-Hung and Violet Pan.

**Moonlight Sword and Jade Lion (Taiwan, 1977: Karl Liao Chiang-Lin)** - I had no idea that kung-fu films could be so complex and confusing. This film is filled with a myriad of characters coming and going and I never am able to quite connect it all up. Still this film has a lot going for it primarily in the form of Angela Mao.

Angela is the main character in the film and has quite a few action scenes with a couple of them being quite good. In fact of all the Angela films that I have seen she definitely causes the biggest body count yet. She shows no mercy and no hesitation in going for the kill. She also looks fabulous here. A new hairdo and well-applied makeup show her feminine side – even when she is in the middle of killing and maiming.

Angela shows up at a small town looking for the brother of her master. He has been missing for a few months and Angela needs to talk to him because only he knows who killed her parents many years previously. It almost turns into an Agatha Christie mystery as Angela tries to uncover a town's dirty secrets and all the witnesses start to get killed off one by one. Slowly, she gets to the bottom of the mystery leaving many corpses in her wake.

Much of the fighting is only so-so but there were two nice scenes with Angela. One is a duel with a friendly adversary in which they use dumplings, tea cups and chop sticks to test each others abilities. The other one is a ten-minute extended scene that has Angela facing off against a group of guys with exploding balloons and then dodging various booby traps.

For the most part an enjoyable film, but either due to poor dubbing or editing it is near impossible to understand what all the characters are up to and what their relationships are.

**Murky Shadows over the Gorges (People's Republic of China, 1985)** - Ah yes, yet another Mainland Chinese kung fu movie. Can't get enough of them. When will I stop tracking these down, you ask? Probably not until after Christmas, when I will have (hopefully) gotten some other DVDs as presents and thus can indulge in kung fu movies NOT made in China (well, Mainland China).

Like the others, I watched this one without the benefit of subtitles. This one had a slightly more complex plot than the other films I had watched, so it was a bit challenging to figure out what was going on. Let's see my notes on the film:

In the beginning of the movie, the Qings are taking people into slavery/servitude. A guy and his sister end up getting pushed over a cliff. She is rescued and is taken to be a servant somewhere. Some years later, there seems to be some sort of conflict between the local militia, appears to be being trained by an old guy with a mustache, and a peasant rebellion or something, led by a young man with awesome skills. When the daughter of the militia trainer is saved from the peasants by their leader, she falls for him. This incurs the ire of the lead member of the militia, who loves the girl, too.

In the second half of the movie, we learn that the daughter's new boyfriend isn't such a good guy after all (although I couldn't figure out what his motives were). In disguise, he kills the father/militia trainer. The servant girl, who loved the lead member of the militia, discovers that the guy is no good. The jealous militia guy takes him on but gets killed. So it's up to the daughter and the servant, who had been hiding her kung fu skills until now, to teach the guy a lesson. The movie ends on a rather sudden battle scene between the Qings and rebels and the fate of the surviving protagonists is ambiguous.

Before anything else, the scenery is absolutely gorgeous. The shots of the titular gorges and the river that passes through them are just compelling. You just can't go wrong with those Chinese landscapes.

The fighting is only sporadic. The actors, however, are very talented. The guy who plays the lead character (the bad guy in disguise) is very good and has some awesome kicks. The others are very solid, too. The girl who plays the servant does some very good pa kua (baguazhang) at the end. There are prerequisite scenes of extras doing various weapons forms and stuff and they're all very good. The last 15 minutes, which begins with a fight between the two male rivals and ends with the lead taking on the two vengeful women is pretty entertaining. Unfortunately, one of the principal fights, the lead vs. the militia leader, is filmed in the dark and basically impossible to see.

**My Blade, My Life (Taiwan, 1978: Chen Ming-Hua)** - For its first half, this Pearl Cheung-starrer is relatively straightforward swordplay with a revenge motif. Relying on bombastic jazz stings and a dizzying camera style, director Chen (The Kings Of Fists And Dollars) largely gets away with this intensity. Loud and to the point swordplay with somewhat gory results makes the movie a decent and almost unashamed audio/visual assault. A more contemplative nature runs through the proceedings as well but these nice intentions are a bit obscured when the genre decides to show up like you expect it to. Ejecuting the mentioned assault with a plethora of characters and muddled twists in the storytelling instead, the feel and tone is for genre-fans but the movie wanted to break out more in the poignancy-department. Hence the decline. Fair to solid and grounded swordplay also deserves a notice since Chen is going for a violent tone. Not a graceful one. Also with Ling Yun, Yueh Hua, Lo Lieh, Lily Li and Cliff Lok.

**My Kung Fu 12 Kicks (Hong Kong, 1979: To Lo Po) - aka Incredible Master Beggars** - Bruce Liang plays a homeless pickpocket who comes to the aid of three kung fu masters left for dead by the villainous Lee Hoi San. After he helps them recover at the abandoned temple he shares with rickshaw puller Ku Feng, the three sifus decide to teach Bruce their styles so that he can get revenge for them. Bruce also has a feud going on with some small time loan sharks which provides for some filler.

The film takes far too long to get going with much of the first half hour being made up of lame comedy and tedious filler. I just find it hard to take Bruce Liang in a comedy role; playing a nice guy when the stories about his true life persona portray him to be anything but. Still, can't deny that he was a gifted screen fighter and when he finally starts his training, things shift up a gear. Bruce Liang was not only a master of kicking, which helped him rise to the top in the early post-Bruce Lee years, but he was also able to change with the times and proved adept at throwing complex shapes with precision and timing.

The hand to hand scenes are extremely well done in this film with Bruce taking on old school heavy weights Ku Feng and Lee Hoi San. Bruce also gets good opportunity to show off those kicks with some impressive leg control and amazing speed. However the lasting feeling after watching this is that given the talent involved, this is not as good as it could have been.

**My Life's on a Line (Taiwan, 1978: Chester Wong) – aka 60 Second Assassin** - Good movie with some great kung fu. Started out feeling like another plotless independent movie, but actually develops a fairly decent plot with a couple good twists. Unfortunately the plot and emotional moments are hindered by mostly bad acting. Luckily, the action more than makes up for that.

Man Lee Pang stars as Minute Fong, a righteous bounty hunter who ends up questioning his line of duty after learning more about his latest target, as well as his boss and the powers that be.

I don't recall seeing Man Lee Pang before this, but he seriously kills it, fighting himself as the awesome Minute Fong, and directing the action. There is some great arm-locking shapes, kicks, and a little acrobatics as well. For most of the duration I was thinking I'd have wished for more Beardy, but the epic finale made up for his lack of screen time. This may be the best fighting performance I have seen from Beardy up to this point. The reliable, if not great supporting cast of people like Lung Fei, Wong Shi Chang, Chen Ping and Wong Wing gave Man Lee Pang just enough talent to make himself look great while pummeling them.

Minute Fong is a great bad ass character, but I wish they would have made more out of his awesome gimmick. Man Lee Pang is an awesome screen fighter and action director and I look forward to seeing more of him. My only gripes are pretty typical for the genre, bad acting, and..Dean Shek. Everything else was pretty good, including the plot. Fantastic action, with a classic finale that I will definitely be revisiting.

**My Name Called Bruce (Hong Kong, 1978: Joseph Kong)** - Behind the rather amusingly mangled English title lies a Bruce Le effort lacking in effort a movie boasting a Super Starring credit really should've had. Joseph Kong (Bruce And Shaolin Kung Fu and credited here as Joseph Valesco) does signal good things at the start with the appearance of an ambulance (with the dead Bruce Lee in it?) and bad guys in protective face masks injecting an antique dealer with a supposed antidote for his sickness. Sweet and outrageous... heck, is it Outbreak Bruceploitation style and a



chase for a diseased monkey is going to paint the narrative in the sweetest Bruceploitation colors possible? Na, it's just a Korean set hunt for robbers by the police and Bruce Le who more or less Super-Stars-very-little. In fact, the film is really devoid of the exploitation it is and seems to want to compete as an action-thriller distancing itself from the commercially viable exploitation it's part of. BAD mistake as it automatically brings in boredom, boring chases and fights in groovy 70s style only sans the fun and groove.

**My Rebellious Son (Hong Kong, 1982: Sun Chung)** - Going into this movie, I was pretty excited. It was directed by one of my favorite directors, Sun Chung, and stars one of my favorite actors, Fu Sheng. This movie was practically made for me. And it lived up to the hype and probably surpassed my expectations.

This is such a fun movie! I'd have to agree that this movie was pretty much tailor-made for Fu Sheng. This is a character that he was meant to play. He's one of the few actors who can overact without being annoying or unrealistic. I always enjoy Fu Sheng's energetic, childish antics and this movie is full of it. Of course, the other characters are great too. Fu Sheng has great chemistry with Ku Feng who plays his dad in the movie. I also love the scenes with Cecilia Wong, especially the ballroom dancing scene which is both hilarious and somewhat romantic. The fighting scenes are also amazing. They're very exciting and the choreography is great. This movie has Sun Chung's name all over it. It's very atmospheric and the soundtrack is awesome. There's even a brief moment that's a bit touching.

Overall, **My Rebellious Son** is essentially THE movie for me. The atmosphere, the soundtrack, the characters, the performances, and the fight scenes are all done just the way I like them. It was tailor-made for Fu Sheng to star in and it's practically tailor-made for me to watch. Best movie ever? No. One of my favorites? Probably.

\*I found out that Sun Chung is considered the "Kubrick of Hong Kong" because of his attention to detail and willingness to shoot a scene as many times as needed in order to get it just right.

**My Young Auntie (Hong Kong, 1980: Lau Kar-Leung)** - While still playing around with the recurring themes of traditional ways being surpassed by the new, Lau Kar Leung bases the plot on an awkward and confusing family situation. Again Lau creates so much more than just an average kung fu film and injects a real sense of fun.

When Yu Sing Chun (Lau Kar Leung) goes to the pier at Canton to greet his recently widowed aunt, Cheng Tai (Hui Ying Hung), he is very much surprised to discover that she is the same age as his own son. It transpires that Cheng Tai only married Yu's uncle to prevent wicked Uncle Three (Wang Lung Wei) from seizing his assets. The rightful heir is Yu and Cheng Tai has not only travelled to Canton to break the news of his uncle's death but also to give him the deeds.

In the Yu household conflict soon arises as Cheng Tai, being the official family elder, tries to impose the traditional family law on Yu's son, Charlie (Hsiao Ho), who has recently returned from college for the summer. Charlie is given the task of chaperoning his great aunt but takes the opportunity to try and humiliate her and the two frequently argue. For argue read: engage in entertaining kung fu scraps which result in much mayhem and destroyed furniture. Yu Sing Chun, meanwhile is caught in the middle trying to keep the peace. However when Uncle Three sends his godson to Canton to steal the deeds the three have to co-operate in order to get them back.

The film never takes itself too seriously and remains positively light hearted for the first hour. Aside from the comedy and farcical situations there are plenty of spectacular martial arts sequences; mainly from Hsiao Hou and Hui Ying Hung who battle against each other. One scene in particular sees Hui Ying Hung wield a straight sword, with fantastic technique, against three masked fencers.

Everything in the first hour however is completely overshadowed by the last thirty minutes which features what must be some of Lau Kar Leung's best work. In fact I would go as far as to say that the final fights in 'My Young Auntie' are as good as anything else ever seen in a kung fu film. You kind of get two endings for the price of one. In the first (almost) climactic battle Hui Ying Hung and Hsiao Hou break into Uncle Three's house and battle with a sword wielding Wilson Tong and Korean strongman Kwon Young Moon. It's possibly the best fight scene I've seen Wilson Tong in as his sword technique here is really superb.

If all this wasn't enough, Lau Kar Leung himself takes centre stage in a classic encounter with Wang Lung Wei. Words couldn't do justice to this scene which places great emphasis on authentic Hung Gar techniques in some of the most intricate sequences ever filmed. Just when you think things can't get any better, the bar is raised even higher as the two fight each other with one arm.

Although the viewer is made to wait for the real action, the main part of the film relying on comedy and farce, its a wait that's more than worthwhile. I simply can't praise this film enough; an absolute 5 star classic.

**Mysterious Heroes (Taiwan, 1977: Chan Siu-Pang) – aka Wu Tang Swordsman - MYSTERIOUS HEROES (1977,** released in the U.S. in a questionable edition as WU TANG SWORDSMAN) offers a strong cast of kung fu performers and a steady stream of well-staged action scenes that will help fans get through a convoluted plot made even more erratic by mistakes in the English dub lines. The storyline revolves around the search for a kung fu master named Lo Tien Fung, who's been missing for 20 years, and the whereabouts of his vaunted "Green-Crested Sword." Carter Wong (18 BRONZEMEN) and his frequent co-star Polly Shang Kwan (aka Lingfeng Shangguan) play kung fu students who embark on the search for Lo and whose ties to Lo are made clear much later in the film. We learn early on that the evil Baron Su Ching (Wang Hsieh) of Dragon Town had imprisoned Lo (Shih Kien) and kept him locked up in a secret dungeon all these years while coveting his famed sword. There is a beggar played by Cliff Lok who functions as a street performer who sings songs about the sinister goings-on in Dragon Town and gets harassed regularly by the Baron's guards. Eventually Carter and Polly acquire Cliff as an ally and learn what they need to plan the rescue of Lo and the retrieval of the sword. There's a lot of family history gradually revealed and a new character introduced late in the film who has a great deal of influence on the protagonists. It can get puzzling at times, but at least there are plenty of large-scale fights with the Baron's army of red-suited guards and, subsequently, a band of killers called the Four Devils. Carter and Lo even fight each other a couple of times.

Carter and Polly frequently take on multiple opponents in the film's most satisfying fight scenes. Polly gets to fight a lot and proves herself one of the more capable female fighters of 1970s kung fu films, although not quite in the same league as Angela Mao and Chia Ling. I've seen her in lots of films, but rarely have her fight scenes been as good as the ones here. She also looks attractive here and has a number of nice costume changes. Veteran actor Shih Kien, most famous in the West for playing the villainous Han in ENTER THE DRAGON, has a lot of fight scenes as well and one of the biggest parts I've ever seen him play. He was in his 60s when he made this and is quite vigorous for his age. Cliff Lok participates in the action as well, although not as much as in his own starring vehicles (e.g. RING OF DEATH, KUNG FU GENIUS), chiefly because he's "undercover" for much of the film. Kam Kong, a regular kung fu villain of the time, plays the Baron's chief henchman and leads the frequent attacks on the heroes. Wang Hsieh, as the Baron, is a formidable enemy, although he doesn't do a lot of fighting himself.

The English-dubbed Wu Tang Collection VHS tape edition I have of this film offers one of the strangest pan-and-scan jobs I've ever seen, with the telecine camera (used to transfer film to video) wildly moving back and forth between the characters. The lack of letter-boxing, combined with the fact that many of the fight scenes take place at night, means that a lot of the action is obscured. The English dub script gets a lot of details wrong. I'll give two examples. At one point, Carter declares his disdain for swords, yet he clearly uses a sword in most of his fight scenes, referring to it as his "Shaolin knife." When the Baron's guards use throwing knives to kill every stranger who comes to town asking for Lo Tien Fung, Carter's English dub line erroneously insists that they're killing everyone claiming to BE Lo Tien Fung. There are various continuity errors also, and references to things we haven't seen, perhaps the result of cuts made to the film somewhere along the way. At one point, Carter's hands are bound together by iron clasps, yet in the very next scene his hands are suddenly free, with no indication of how that was managed. Late in the film, Lo asks Polly, "Do you remember the 13 techniques I taught you?"—even though she's too young to have ever been a student of his and there's no point in the film when he would have had the opportunity to teach her anything. Somehow, I'm bound to conclude that the best way to experience this film is with an original Mandarin soundtrack, with subtitles, and a letter-boxed widescreen transfer of an uncut print.

The VHS tape box wrongly credits the film's direction to Wilson Tong. The actual on-screen directorial credit goes to Chan Siu-Pang, who also directed THE MAGNIFICENT (1979), which I've also reviewed on this site. The credited action director is Chan Sui Chung and the credited kung fu instructors are the director, Chan Siu-Pang, and cast member Shih Kien.

**Mysterious Knight, The (Taiwan, 1969: Chan Lit-Ban) -** Brevity and some worthwhile glimpses into commendable, intense swordplay for the time, otherwise The Mysterious Knight executes in a way too mild manner to be noticed. Our lead and titular character has a playful aura about him and the relationship with the two swordswomen is interesting for a bit. But when full motivations are revealed through clumsy exposition, the movie manages to make itself incoherent instead. And since it has precious little genre-color outside of said bursts of action, a lot of interest vanishes by the end.

**Mystery of Chess Boxing, The (Taiwan, 1979: Joseph Kuo)** - Lee Yi Min stars as a young boy who wants to learn kung fu so that he can avenge his father's death at the hands of the Ghost Faced Killer. The Ghost Faced Killer meanwhile is hunting down a number of clan leaders who all conspired to have him killed.

Lee Yi Min tries a local kung fu school but is bullied by the seniors. The cook of the school (Yuen Siu Tin) takes the boy under his wing and teaches him some moves after some begging. Unfortunately Lee Yi Min is thrown out of the school when he is found in possession of the Ghost Faced Killers' symbol. Still wishing to learn kung fu Lee Yi Min turns to an old chess master, recommended by the cook, for training. The chess master, it transpires, is an old enemy of the Ghost Faced Killer who inevitably turns up in the film's climax.

While this movie may lack the lavish sets and costumes of the Shaw Brothers' films the low production values do not detract in any way from the excellently choreographed fight scenes. The obvious skill of the cast shines through in just about every shot. The leg work of the Ghost Faced Killer (not sure who plays him) is especially dazzling (comparable with Hwang Jang Lee) as are the acrobatics of Lee Yi Min. Jack Long is also excellent as the old chess master which sees his chess boxing technique take on the GFK's mighty five elements technique in a spectacular two on one finale.

A true classic of the genre.

**Na Cha And The Seven Devils (Hong Kong, 1973: Yamanouchi Tetsuya)** - Compared to the Chang Cheh adaptation of the Chinese protection deity Na Cha the year after, this 1973 Shaw Brothers production does not go for the origin point but the little boy amongst gods in heaven goes on an adventure among many presumably out of the literary works. Na Cha (Yau Lung, who is more age appropriate for the role) accidentally makes a rare kind of peach, that becomes ripe every thousand years or so, drop to earth and has to retrieve them before they end up in the wrong hands due to the power they possess. Well they do and the titular devils (coming in the form of a frog, eagle, rat, horse etc) get their snack and take on a form that allows them to terrorize humans. A wise choice to depict at Shaw Brothers who do well providing the special effects trickery needed to make the world of gods and humans come to life. The key here is that they don't lean on one set of inclusion but mixes wire work, rear- and front projection shots, miniatures, puppets etc in a restrained and clever way. It really does make the world feel fantastical as it should and also very physical due to the practical effects at hand here. This is no frantic fantasy entry but a fun, snappy one by director Yamanouchi Tetsuya (co-director of the 1969 Taiwanese Na Cha movie Feng Shen Bang). Despite also skipping on the gruesome backstory, the content is sometimes bloody and mildly adult at points as the devils use their newly gained powers for sexual purposes as well. Also starring Ching Li, Tina Chin Fei and Chen Hung-Lieh.

**Na Cha The Great (Hong Kong, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - Made for Chang Cheh's Taiwanese production company and distributed by Shaw Brothers, he depicts the story of the Chinese protection deity Na Cha (also referred to as Nezha and played here by Alexander Fu Sheng) from battling the oppressing dragon prince, self sacrifice, resurrection and feuding with his father in the wake of the family's disgrace. The lean is obviously towards the fantastical, with this being a world of humans, demons with a Na Cha curious about the world and trying to do the right thing by protecting those in need. As originally written, the tale is partly very gruesome (including Na Cha's graphic suicide that is shown briefly in red filters as this bloodshed would not pass censors in any other way but a latter scene is a bloodbath in every colour EXCEPT red. Well played) and Chang Cheh stays true to these basic beats yet brings down his usual bloodshed to a level where this is ALMOST general audiences-friendly. The half hour leading up to Na Cha's death and resurrection drags a little but the remaining hour is a fairly fun time of special effects imagery with action set pieces on both earth and in heaven. This means Lau Kar-Leung and Tong Gai's action choreography (mostly grounded and in itself quite solid without raising eyebrows) is also added upon by rear projection, puppetry (way preferably to a computer generated fight with a dragon had it been made today), and we of course get the depiction of Na Cha's trusted weapons such as the Wind Fire Wheels and the Universe Ring. Colourful, quite evenly paced and Fu Sheng tackles the role with youthful, energetic flavour (the character is otherwise often depicted as a young boy). Also with Fung Hak-On, Lo Dik, Kong Do and Jamie Luk as a giant.

**Naval Commandos, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Chang Cheh)** - The Naval Commandos is the story of The Chinese Navy, led by Ti Lung, defending the coastline against the Japanese. Chi Kuan Chun is the captain of a small torpedo boat who devises a plan to sink the Japanese's largest ship, the Izuma. When the plan fails, Chi and the surviving members of Torpedo Boat 102 go ashore to continue their mission and seek the aid of David Chiang and Fu Sheng.

For a change, this movie centers around Chi Kuan Chun's character even though David Chiang, Ti Lung and Fu Sheng are his co-stars. His character is the most important as it is his mission to sink the Izuma. The story is told in a flashback by Lau Wing to Chi's grown son, also a Navy captain, who has never met his father. This is an

unconventional way of telling a story but it works. We get the entire story sandwiched between “present day scenes”. Even though Chi’s character again is the strong silent type, you get a clear sense of the kind of leader he is and what makes him tick.

Another interesting part of the story is you do not know if David Chiang and Fu Sheng’s characters are good guys right away. You see them fraternizing with the enemy for most of the movie making them appear to be Japanese sympathizers. Also, Fu Sheng and Chi Kuan Chun don’t like each other causing them to fight each other on several occasions. I love when these two fight each other. Usually they play brothers having friendly spats and Fu learns from Master Chi. This movie stretches their acting chops pitting the friends against each other.

Another rarity is there are no scenes with Chiang and Ti Lung together. Ti’s role is much smaller than usual. This film was made after the pairing had a serious falling out personally. They had already agreed to do the movie but only if they did not have to share scenes together. This does not hurt the film at all.

Seeing 4 of the 5 Venoms in this film is also a bonus for me. Lu Feng, Chiang Shiang, and Kuo Chui are crew members on Torpedo Boat 102. They ultimately help complete the mission. Lo Meng works for David Chiang and can be spotted with a few second tier Venoms at Chiang’s home.

I enjoy watching this movie more than 7-Man Army. There is much less battle with firearms. There is also less fighting which is mostly found at the end of the movie. But the best fights are between Chi and Fu as enemies. The story was more important in this film than the fighting. I loved the cast and couldn’t see anyone else playing these roles. Overall, this is a good war based film.

**New Fist of Fury (Hong Kong, 1976: Lo Wei) - Aka Nova Fúria do Dragão; Shaolin Contra os Filhos do Sol; O Regresso do Invencível** - In 1976, Jackie Chan signed on to Lo Wei’s production company, Lo Wei being the same fellow who directed Bruce Lee’s first two films. Up until then, Jackie had had only one starring role (in *Young Tiger of Canton*, later released as *Snake Fist Fighter*) and numerous gigs as a stuntman and supporting character. Lo Wei set out to make Chan into a star, although he didn’t quite know how to do so. Over the course of two years, Lo Wei would cast Chan as a *wuxia* villain, a *wuxia* hero, a serious kung fu hero and even a role originally meant for Bruce Lee. However, for their first collaboration, Lo actually put Chan in Bruce’s shoes and cast him as the successor to Bruce Lee’s most popular screen persona, the legendary Chen Zhen.

*New Fist of Fury*, despite being dismissed as a Bruce Lee cash-in film (which it was to a certain extent), actually begins promisingly. We open with Inspector Lo (Lo Wei, reprising his role from the original film) sneaking across Shanghai to an abandoned building. Hidden in one of the rooms upstairs is Ma Li’er (Nora Miao, also playing the same role she did in the Bruce Lee classic) and two other Ching Wu students (one of whom is the portly Chiang Kam of *Snake in the Eagle’s Shadow*). According to Li’er, the Japanese consul reneged on his promise to spare the rest of the school after Chen Zhen’s murder and the students were hunted down until the last three were forced to go into hiding. Inspector Lo has made arrangements for Li’er and her colleagues to flee to Taiwan, where she can hide out at her grandpa’s place and plan for her revenge against the Japanese.

Shortly after Li’er’s arrival, one of her packages is stolen by a local thief, Helong (a pre-eye surgery Jackie Chan). Hoping for something of value, Helong is surprised to find the package containing only a pair of *nunchaku*. Helong is determined to give the weapon back to its owners when he’s invited to one of the local kung fu schools by its teacher (Henry Luk), who’s in cahoots with the Japanese. Helong refuses to join the school on the principle that he can’t support anyone who regularly browns noses the enemy. That simply earns him a sound beating which almost kills him, if it were for Li’er and Mr. Hong (Han Ying-Chieh, the villain from *The Big Boss/Fists of Fury*), who find Helong and nurse him back to health. Li’er finds something to admire in Helong’s principles, even though he turns down repeated invitations from her to study kung fu.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hong and his business partner, Ma’s grandfather, are actually trying to plan a rebellion against the Japanese in secret. An assassination attempt on the local karate master, Okumura (Chen Sing, who played a Japanese villain in *The Chinese Boxer* and *Shanghai 13*), prompts the same to use his clout to bully the local schools into being assimilated into his school. Actually, most of the bullying is performed by his daughter (Cheng Siu Siu), who goes around picking fights with whomever she wants. When they show up at Li’er’s grandfather’s 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration and try to pick a fight with the Peking Opera actors, the stress is too much for gramps, who kicks the bucket on the spot.

This convinces Li’er to reopen the Ching Wu school and start teaching the mi-tsung fist style to the Taiwanese locals. The school who tried to coerce Helong into training with them shows up and gets their collective arses handed back to them. That’s enough for the Okumura and his daughter to show up and humiliate the students. *That* is the last

straw for Helong, who decides that it's time to make a stand and learn kung fu. Will he learn the "fist of fury" style quick enough to use at the special "meeting" scheduled by the Okumura for all the local kung fu teachers?

There are a myriad of problems with this particular film, which is surprising, if you consider that director Lo Wei had been responsible for the original *Fist of Fury*. I've read in several places that Bruce Lee did most of the work on his Lo Wei films, while the director just lounged about and slept. If that's true, that may explain why the two films are so drastically different, despite boasting similar themes. Many of this film's flaws stem from the script. The original *Fist of Fury* took a simple premise of a man avenging his teacher's murder and turned it into a compelling tale of an individual standing up to the forces of oppression, and those on the sidelines who ultimately suffer the consequences for it.

This movie, on the other hand, is all over the place, with more subplots and characters than it knows what to do with. First we have Miss Lee's quest for vengeance against the Japanese, which never gels because for all of her spunk, Miss Lee never gets her hands dirty, fight-wise. Nora Miao probably wasn't a martial artist, but she at least faked it well in films like *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*. She barely even tries here. Then there's a subplot about her grandfather in charge of a revolutionary movement and his suspicion of government corruption that is dropped before making much of a contribution to the story only to be brought up again near the end without adding anything at all to the film—in fact, it kills the movie's momentum since it's unrelated to the final fight. Another plot thread involving Helong's mother being a brothel madam who regularly supplies the Japanese men with prostitutes does little for the film beyond supplying it with a few moments of melodrama. That leaves us with the major storylines, which are Helong's journey from a reluctant thief to Chen Zhen's spiritual successor and Mr. Okumura's attempts to assert influence over Taiwan's kung fu schools.

Much like the other subplots, these two plotlines feel underdeveloped, mainly because Lo Wei is too busy letting everything else get in the way. Helong's thread is especially problematic, because it means that Jackie Chan has very little to contribute to the movie until the third act, when he finally starts his training. *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* had Jackie Chan's character undergo a similar journey, but wisely kept the focus on Jackie and pushed his training into the second act, giving him more time to showcase his skills. Unfortunately, that's not the case here. The main conflict with the Japanese villain is unconvincing because other than kill a few would-be assassins, he never comes across as being truly evil. Sure he's a jerk for strong-arming the local schools, but he seems nowhere near as corrupt as Mr. Suzuki or sadistic as General Fujita. Then again, so little time is given to his quest to consolidate his power over Chinese kung fu that it becomes just another undeveloped plot thread.

Problems in *New Fist of Fury*'s plotting inevitably results in flaws in the action direction, especially the pacing. The first real fight doesn't occur until 40 minutes into the movie, which is an especially grave error in a 1970s chop-socky film. Following the succession of three brief martial arts sequences, we're almost 70 minutes into the film before the next fight occurs. And then there's the whole Jackie Chan as a good-for-nothing layabout bit, which means that he won't be performing any martial arts until after he's been trained. Since that doesn't occur until the third act, that means Jackie Chan will only let loose during the film's finale. Bad move, Lo Wei. We understand that Jackie Chan wasn't a household name at that point, but who wants to see a movie starring the potential "next Bruce Lee" if that actor isn't even going to fight until the very end? It's ultimately *that* problem, more than the script, which sinks the film faster than a Chinese junk facing a Yamato-class battleship.

Han Ying-Chieh was something of a pioneer in modern fight choreography, offering his talents to early *wuxia* classics like *Come Drink with Me* and *A Touch of Zen*. He also directed the non-Bruce Lee fight scenes to *The Big Boss* and *Fist of Fury*, and the difference between his work and Bruce's is stark indeed. At his worst, Han Ying-Chieh exemplified everything that was wrong with early 1970s: flailing arms, lack of power in the hits and sloppy kicking. The action here is a little better than his work in those early Bruce Lee movies. Jackie Chan acquits himself well, especially during his fight with Cheng Siu-Siu, where he uses some more acrobatic moves and drop kicks. He even uses some praying mantis techniques, which Chan never used in his movies, since he mainly focused on southern Chinese styles. Unlike Bruce Lee's Chen Zhen, Chan's Helong spends both of the two final fights as the underdog, which was a questionable decision since it undercuts a lot of his physical talents.

Chan Sing is also solid, using his usual tiger claw technique (despite playing a Japanese villain) and sai swords. Cheng Siu-Siu, who plays Okumura's daughter, kicks pretty well, although her jump kicks are obvious wire/trampoline-assisted. Everybody else, including Han Ying himself, are pretty nondescript. Where the fighting really falters is those moments where Chan tries to ape Bruce Lee with the slow motion hand movements, which look extremely silly, and the use of the nunchaku at the end. Both are badly-filmed and choreographed, cheapening the otherwise decent choreography. Nonetheless, there isn't enough action here to justify the movie's existence and keep this from being one of Jackie Chan's worst movies ever.

**New Game of Death (Taiwan, 1975: Lin Pin, Harold Swartz) - aka Goodbye Bruce Lee, His Last Game of Death -** While 'Game of Death' and 'Tower of Death' could be viewed as exploitative, they did at least have major studio

backing, decent sized budgets and featured the work of some of the best Hong Kong choreographers/actors of the day. 'New Game of Death' unfortunately has none of these saving graces to give it any value whatsoever. The problems start right from the very beginning and it soon becomes clear that the producers didn't really have a credible plot device to get Bruce Li into that yellow track suit.

Bruce Li plays a Bruce Lee look-a-like approached by film producers to help complete the unfinished 'Game of Death'. When Bruce agrees he is asked to view the unfinished footage so that he can learn the real Bruce Lee's style. It's this footage that takes up the rest of the movie and far from featuring Bruce Lee it is actually Bruce Li in a story that has nothing to do with 'Game of Death' other than a pagoda at the end. It just seems that the film makers were really struggling for ideas here.

The plot of this 'film within a film' isn't really worth mentioning, suffice to say that the climax sees Bruce Li, in the yellow tracksuit, fight his way up five levels of a pagoda with a different adversary on each floor. His opponents include a Japanese swordsman, a western wrestler, a western boxer and an Indian nunchaku expert. The choreography for the fighting is quite substandard made even worse by the fact that Bruce Li doesn't really move like the real Bruce and appears clumsy and slow rather than lightfooted. In other Bruce Li films that I've seen he hasn't done too badly but here it just doesn't work and maybe points to the low budget and rushed shooting schedules. One to avoid.

**New One Armed Swordsman (Hong Kong, 1971: Chang Cheh)** - Chang Cheh re-invents his classic hero in a film that sees a faster pace and much more bloodletting than the dark and brooding original.

In a completely unrelated story, David Chiang takes over from Jimmy Wang Yu as a martial arts hero who cuts off his own arm after losing in a duel to another famous martial artist (Ku Feng). ? is obsessively jealous of any young martial artists who may become future rivals and makes a practice of challenging them. David Chiang leaves the martial arts world and takes a job in an inn but returns to fighting when his friend ? (Ti Lung) falls to a similar fate at the hands of ?

A defining role for David Chiang in a film that climaxes with one of the finest and bloodiest showdown's of Chang Cheh's filmography. Apparently it didn't fare as well at the box office as the Wang Yu films but David Chiang brings his own brand of intensity to the role. The fight scenes are handled fantastically and the battle set on a bridge where Chiang slays dozens is ingenious. A classic of the swordplay genre.

**New Pilgrims To The West (Taiwan, 1982, Chen Chun-Liang)** - Although a little hard to fully appreciate in cropped form, Chen Chun-Liang's (The Child of Peach) re-telling of a couple of key and known episodes out of 'Journey To The West' is approachable enough and delivers a fairly steady stream of energy. Sharper when dealing in weapons action choreography in combination with wire work, some of the animated special effects performed in single takes are quite remarkably well pulled off. With its very episodic narrative, it's easy to stick with the sections but some resort to more children friendly buffoonery rather than technical creativity and the fun energy born out of that. But for fans of Taiwanese cinema putting its celluloid in full gear should find a decent amount to like here. Starring Liu Shang-Chien as the Monkey King and Liang Hsiu-Chen as Monk Tripitaka. Also with Elsa Yeung and Chen Kuan-Tai.

**Nine Demons (Taiwan, 1983: Chang Cheh) - aka Nine Venoms** - Its difficult to associate this with the man who brought us classics like 'Blood Brothers', 'Shaolin Martial Arts' and 'Five Deadly Venoms', what was Chang Cheh thinking when he put together this nonsense?

Before I start with the synopsis I'll begin by saying that whoever scripted the English dub track must have been having a laugh as the characters have names like Gary (no word of a lie), Joey, Roland and even Trevor. Anyway the story goes something like this; Gary and Joey are two friends who narrowly escape death when Gary's family estate is attacked. While Gary is captured and killed Joey falls through a gateway to 'The Black Paradise' (Hell in other words) and meets 'The Black Prince' who grants him a wish. Joey's wish is to bring Gary back to life but the price for this is that Joey must pledge allegiance to the Black Prince and carry within him the spirits of nine demons who must be fed on human blood daily. Joey returns from the underworld and starts visiting his enemies to get revenge by feeding them to the demons. Word obviously gets around and Joey's surviving enemies join together to put an end to the killing.

The film relies an awful lot on special effects but with the micro-budget given to this film the effects are simply abysmal. That and the terrible dub track make it very hard to take this film seriously and more than once we found ourselves laughing for all the wrong reasons. Its a shame though because the fight scenes are all extremely well choreographed and certainly up to the standard you would expect from a Venoms/Chang Cheh movie. Sadly any good fight scenes are immediately followed by flashing lights and flying skulls (so obviously dangling from wires) that fly about and attack people.

Although this is supposed to be a Venoms film, the only two I recognised were Chiang Sheng, as Trevor, and Lu Feng as one of Joey's enemies. Both of these roles are supporting rather than starring and neither of these two are involved in any fights until the second half, although Lu Feng is the main villain in the film's climax.

Nine Venoms is a strange, silly movie that has some excellent fight scenes but is sadly ruined by a stupid plot and terrible (laughable) special effects.

**99 Cycling Swords (Taiwan, 1978: Hsu Tien-Yung) - Lung Wei Village; Killer Hillz** - What a treat this Polly Shang Kwan film turned out to be. It has the quota of action expected from a kung-fu film, but on top of that it has a terrifically charming performance from Polly. That was not unexpected, as Polly often is much more playful in her interpretations of her characters than most of the other kung-fu females were. She was considered an actress as much as an action star and in fact one time won the Taiwanese Best Actress award.

In this slightly convoluted story Polly is one among many trying to track down a mysterious man in white who is attempting to bring back the Ching dynasty to power. As this mystery man always wears a hat low over his face no one knows what he looks like and everyone becomes a suspect during the film. As the suspects slowly get killed off the list narrows down to only a few – sort of like an Agatha Christie novel but with a lot more mayhem!

Polly show up one day – coincidentally all dressed in white – and has to fight off a roomful of attackers before she convinces them that she is not the man they are looking for. I say the “man” because Polly is disguised as a male for nearly all of the film. The fact that she is small, cute and has breasts doesn't seem to clue anyone in.

This scenario produces some sexual confusion as she tells another man that she loves him – and though he has appeared to be attracted to Polly has to tell him that he doesn't swing that way. Polly pops up though as her own twin sister to capture the man's heart. At the same time, for much of the film another female is quite infatuated with the disguised Polly.

The film has a large number of fight scenes and many of them have imaginative touches and lots of highflying acrobatics and use of some wire work to jump into trees and such. Lo Lieh shows up as well from time to time – and it turns out that he is promised in an arranged marriage to Polly – and is looking for her everywhere. Little does he know!

**Ninja Avenger, The (Taiwan, 1983: Tommy Lee) - a.k.a Impossible Woman** - Marlyn (Elsa Yang) is saved from a gang of rapists in Japan by crime boss Nancy (Mizuno Yuko). When Nancy gets into trouble with the law, she asks Marlyn to come to Hong Kong and help her eliminate some former clients. Meanwhile tough cop Wong Tao is out to bust the female crime boss and put her behind bars.

Ninja Avenger is certainly an unusual early 80's Taiwanese production, filmed entirely on location in Hong Kong. It has all the ingredients for an action classic, but somehow it manages to miss the mark despite a pretty decent cast and fight choreographer. There is little to no details about any of the characters involved, or how Marlyn acquired her stealthy ninja skills. It's also odd that she would need saving from a gang of three men in Japan, when she spends a lot of the movies run time dodging assassins with ease. I know its not always the best thing to analyze these low budget productions, but this film really leaves you bewildered a lot of the time. The movie isn't without some positives though, some of the action is pretty decent and the supporting cast in the form of Wong Tao and Ysukei Kurata made it bearable. Tommy Lee(**Gam Ming**) is a really talented Martial Arts action director and star. Sadly his skills didn't transfer to directing, the fact he had directed three movies pre to his show he wasn't new to the job. Lee only went on to direct one more feature film **To Catch A Thief**(1984), which Ive yet to have the privilege of watching.

This movie does not feature the best example of Tommy Lee's choreography skills. To make thing's worse there isn't that much action in this film, at least not by Asian standards. That said some of the fights do have their moments, in particular the finale which I'll get back to. For the most part its Elsa Yang's(**Devil Killer**) ninja lady Marlyn who is dishing out the fists and feet of fury. She was already a veteran of over fifty films by the time she made this one and

would eventually appear in seventy five movies. While I have seen some titles from her filmography there's little I can recall about them. Yang could clearly handle herself and she pretty proficient in the movies action scenes, with the use of some doubles at times. It sadly Tommy Lee fight choreography that lets this one down. It's pretty average at best, especially when compared with his other work on **Eagles Claw**(1978) & **Rage Of The Wind**(1972) to name just a couple of examples. The film also suffered from too many badly acted dramatic scenes that dilutes what Martial Arts content there is. It's as if the producers were unsure about what kind of film they wanted this to be. They hired some great physically gifted actors then appeared reluctant to use them properly.

According the films credits sequence the stunts were handled by the Dare Devil Squad. Never heard of this stunt team before so I cant comment on any of their other work. This being a contemporary production we treated to a few car/motorbike chases. Usually involving Elsa Yang on foot trying to escape said vehicles. I gonna take a guess and say these sequence were filmed with the help of the above stunt team. Hong Kong cinema at the time was making a transition into producing more films with modern settings. That featured vehicle stunts which you rarely if at all got in a 1970s old school movies. While the stunts here are not quite on the same level as the ones seen in U.S movies of the time. The guys who performed them certainly risked their necks and deserved to have their talents appear in a better movie.

Getting back to the hand to hand combat, the mighty Wong Tao skills are greatly underused. His character is forgotten about during the middle of the film, until he reappears during a brief fight scene. We get to see some nice kicks from him, but he spends most of his time chain smoking and looking bored. With the exception of the finale most of the fighting is pretty brief and to the point. Like I said earlier Elsa Yang is a capable screen fighter, but here she doesn't perform anything too special. The best way to describe her style is generic, which could be applied to all the casts members except for Kurata. He faces off against our heroine in the final showdown. Apart from slapping some thugs around Kurata unfortunately only has two fights during the entire run time. They hired one of Martial Arts cinema best talents and then for some dumb reason underused him. That said the showdown in the dojo at the end of the movie is pretty decent. It would have been nice to see Elsa Yang taking on more opponents, but its still a pretty solid one on one fight. Yusuaki Kurata shows off his classy kicking skills, he appears to be one of the few cast members putting any effort into their role. The opening credits are pretty unique, as we see someone extracting poison from a snakes venom glands and wiping it onto throwing stars etc.

There are a few things I'd like to mention before wrapping this one up. There's a cameo by veteran Hong Kong actor and go to villain Cheng Fu-Hung(**Guy With Secret Kung Fu**). He does his usual thing of chasing the lead actress around until eventually he gets a clobbering. A random late night busker(**Man Lee Pang**) who befriends Marlyn after trying to stop some thugs from harassing her. Come to think about it Elsa Yangs character is a magnet for leery male characters in this one. One of the few non leery males in the film is a bearded Yun Chunv-Yue(**Jade Dragon Ninja**), who falls for our lady ninja. He's also pretty handy with his fists when he get the chance to use them. According to the **HKMDB** he appeared in more family based dramas the Kung Fu movies. Like many of the cast members here, he is given little to showcase his abilities. One of the film co-stars David Wu Dai-Wai(**Buddhist Fist**) did double duties as assistant director. I'm not sure just how much of the film negative can be placed on him or Tommy Lee?. The opening credits are pretty unique, as we see someone extracting poison from a snakes venom glands and wiping it onto throwing stars etc.

Ninja Avenger is not a title I'd recommend to fans unless they are Wong Tao, Yusuaki Kurata and Tommy Lee completists. It's not one of those old Asian titles that been misleadingly marketed as a ninja film either. The lead character spends some time dressed up as a ninja stalking people at night. There's no footage inserted from other movies like many of the IFD/Filmark ninja exploitation titles either. Yet for some reason despite the people involved the film just fails to deliver. The movie struggles to be average at best and should be viewed as just a curiosity rather than a must see.

**Ninja Holocaust (South Korea, 1985: Yueng Chuen Bong) – aka City Ninja** - Let's just get it out of the way upfront – 'City Ninja' is such a muddled production, the very prospect of reviewing it and providing some kind of background of how it came to be is an intimidating one. Almost every source available presents small variances on the backstory, however having now watched it, the one that seems to make the most sense goes like this – in 1983 director Choi Young-chul make a Korean action movie by the name of 'Hwa-ya', that featured Casanova Wong and imported Hong Kong star Chan Wai-Man. In this version, Wai-Man is the bad guy and ultimately dies in the finale.

This is where it gets confusing. A couple of years later, a source that was most likely Godfrey Ho decided to re-jig it, notably not for an overseas audience as he did with so many Korean productions, but for a local HK audience. The reason I say Godfrey Ho is that, despite his name not being directly mentioned on the likes of either the Hong Kong or Korean Movie Database, the editing style has his name all over it, and although not a significant detail in the



movie itself, the inclusion of gweilo actor Andy Chowosky. Chowosky featured in 3 movies in 1985, and the only one that doesn't implicitly state Ho's name as the director is this one. I'd assumed the co-director listed on hkmdb, one Yeung Chun-Bong, must for sure be one of Ho's many aliases, however Chun-Bong does have one other movie to his name as a director called 'Searching for Love', which was released in 1986. So, is he the real deal or not? I have a feeling we'll never know.

There is of course, one other major factor that indicate the involvement of Godfrey Ho, and that comes in the form of ninjas. 'City Ninja', despite not quite being geographically accurate, does at least half deliver on its promise in the form of ninjas aplenty. One source states that Casanova Wong filmed additional scenes once Hwa-ya was picked up for HK distribution, and there certainly seems to be some truth in this. There are moments when he appears bulkier than in his initial scenes, in which he cuts a slimmer figure, but again how much truth there is in this we'll likely never know. Whatever the case, Hwa-ya was eventually re-jigged and released in Hong Kong under the new title of 'Rocky's Love Affairs' in 1985, and even made a profit, leading it to be dubbed into English and released to western audiences either under the alias of 'City Ninja' or 'Ninja Holocaust'.

All of the above elements of course usually add up to a horrendous unwatchable mess, but not the case for 'City Ninja' (this is the title I watched it under, hence the review referring to this version), which somehow manages to be 90 minutes of pure entertainment from start to finish. A pre-credits sequence takes place in Hong Kong during World War II, in which a gweilo soldier is hunted down by ninjas that want to get their hands on a necklace in his possession. It turns out the necklace has a Swiss bank account access code carved into it, so those pesky Japanese want to get rich. Skip forward to modern day Hong Kong, and it's revealed that half of the necklace is in HK, with the other half in Korea. Both Casanova Wong and Chan Wai Man, who play kickboxers, end up hired by gangsters in each of their countries to find the other half of the necklace. Oh, and there's ninjas.

The logic of the plot falls apart the moment you give it more than 2 seconds thought, so the recommendation is not to. Instead, sit back and enjoy Casanova Wong and Chan Wai Man kicking ass and having sex for 90 minutes. Indeed, it seems 'City Ninja' at least in part wants to be a saucy softcore romp, to the point that when it ended, I had a hard time remembering if either of them did anything apart from interchange between fight scenes and sex scenes for most of the duration. The excuse for all this is as illogical as everything else. Wai Man has a fiancé, but his sexually frustrated manager wants to use him to fulfil her desires, which he never objects to. At its most bizarre, the pair end up doing it against one of the padded corners of a boxing ring, to which they then smoothly transition to a rowing machine. Such imagination, and a whole 6 years before 'Sex and Zen'!

Casanova Wong on the other hand ends up falling for the moll that was hired by the gangster he's working for to basically seduce and make sure he agrees to do the job. Naturally, to complicate things, she also falls for him as well. Hilariously, these parallel plot lines unfolding in Hong Kong and Korea respectively, at one point result in both Wong and Wai Man being involved in sex scenes within 5 minutes of each other (note: I said 'of each other', not 'with each other'). With that being said, the main actresses tend to keep their modesty through strategically placed limbs or camera angles, with only an overzealous Caucasian lady at a bar willing to expose everything, which she does via ripping all her clothes off once a victorious Chai Man enters with his entourage. Bizarre.

But let's face it, nobody is checking into a title like 'City Ninja' to see how good Wong and Wai Man are in bed (at least I assume they're not), we're here for the action, and in that regard, it delivers in spades. Despite the presence of Wai Man, the majority of the action beats fall to Casanova Wong, and to see him letting loose in that rare contemporary setting is a joy to behold. The audience doesn't have to wait long to see him in action, when at just over 10 minutes he's facing off against a man mountain of a Thai kickboxer in the ring, and from then opportunities for him to unleash come thick and fast. A standout is his assault on a pool bar, that puts Steven Seagal's rampage in 'Out for Justice' to shame, as he takes out a room full of thugs with lightning fast kicks, all the while having to avoid pool balls being shot at him by a kabuki makeup wearing Japanese villain. To top it off, the scene ends with him in a mud wrestling ring, what more could you ask for?

He also gets a rooftop fight scene against an imposing African American sniper, which predates the Donnie Yen versus Michael Woods scene in 'In the Line of Duty 4' by 4 (possibly 6) years, and I'd daresay with the way the fight concludes was possibly an influence on it. One point that Yen certainly has over Wong though, is that he didn't perform the fight with the seam of his pants between the legs completely ripped, exposing bright red underwear underneath. Surprisingly it's not the only fight scene involving underwear exposure, as when Wong and his girl (played by Chae Eun-hui) are confronted by numerous thugs, the pair engage in some nicely choreographed tandem fighting. Wong manipulates Eun-hui's body to kick the living daylight out of the thugs, resulting in some gratuitous underwear flashing on Eun-hui's part. While all of this may seem out of place in a kung fu flick, it's important to remember how popular erotic cinema became in Korea during the 80's, once the heavy censorship of the earlier decade has been removed.

The final 25 minutes of 'City Ninja' are essentially one long action sequence, which have the wonderfully welcome surprise of Eagle Han Ying showing up as the main villain. Well, kind of main villain. Thanks again to the editing, Wai Man goes from good guy to bad guy with wafer thin explanation. When he finally boards a plane to Korea, he and

Wong meet for the first time at the 1 hour mark, however with Wong's girlfriend already kidnapped, the Korean is more preoccupied with getting her back (especially since she's being tortured via being spun around on a big red platform, the horror!) than any necklace nonsense. What follows is Wong going on a 10 minute rampage against a small army of ninjas in a cemetery, before it segues into a two-on-one as he takes on both an empty handed Eagle Han Ying and katana wielding Park Yun-geun, which makes for a ferociously satisfying fight in a warehouse. Han Ying in particular looks as fast and sharp as he ever has here.

Then, like that, we have a randomly inserted sex scene with the gangster who hired Wai Man and his moll. In retrospect though, this scene appears to have been inserted in order to bridge the scene of Wong's fight against Han Ying and Yun-geun, and the ultimate final fight against Wai Man, so in that regard, it's forgivable. Why? Simply because watching Wong and Wai Man go at each other is worth the price of admission alone, as they launch a barrage of kicks against the other with an almost animal like ferocity. I wasn't entirely convinced that they didn't in fact want to kill each other. It's a fantastically intense fight, from two of the most legitimate fighters to ever grace the screen, and it doesn't disappoint. Except for, that is, one of the most infuriating freeze frame finishes to a fight I've ever seen. Actually I'm sure the fight was over, however the editing cuts it off at the worst place possible, which almost made me throw the remote at the screen. Again, this most likely is connected to the new ending the HK version was given, which doesn't involve Wai Man dying.

Despite the above qualm, the sheer quality of the action (both in and out of the bedroom) makes it easy to recommend. Both Casanova Wong and Chan Wai Man look legitimately dangerous when they're called on to fight, and that's no easy feat when you're in a kung fu movie and people can get hurt. The bizarreness of everything in-between only adds to its incoherent charm, from the Japanese villain balancing upside down with one hand on a pool table, while preparing to take a shot with the other, to the elaborate acrobatic displays the ninjas perform just to create a human seat for their master. 'City Ninja' may have a generic title, but trust me when I say it's not a term you could apply to any other aspect of it.

**Ninja Hunter (Taiwan, 1984: Wu Kuo Ren) - aka Wu Tang Vs Ninja - There** are times when all you want (well, me anyway) is non stop fighting with minimal plot and maybe a bit of sauciness thrown in for good measure. Wu Tang vs Ninja is for exactly those times. The plot, standard of acting and dubbing are pretty typical for films of this ilk but the movie is lifted by some quality action.

After Abbot White (Jack Long) of the Wu Tang clan is defeated in a duel by a senior Shaolin monk he swears revenge and makes a pact with the ninja sect. The ninjas storm Shaolin temple and force the monks into hiding. Meanwhile Abbot White spends his time learning some strange powers which involves draining the life force of scantily clad young women. When word of the attack on Shaolin gets around, two sympathisers (one of whom is Alex Lo Rei) decide to get revenge. First though they have to learn the Shaolin finger jab technique.

The film is filled with extravagant fight scenes from the opening minutes until the end, pausing only for some very cheesy (un)erotic scenes. Despite some severe undercranking the fights are still impressive due to the creative choreography and often interesting props. The penultimate battle set in the Ninja's adventure playground (sorry, assault course) is a particular winner but there's quite a few surprising moments throughout and plenty that have 'rewind' value. Best moment of the film though is during the final climax when, after having spent months learning the Shaolin 'finger jab', the two heroes only think to use it when reminded by their female companion watching from the sidelines.

**Ninja in Ancient China (People's Republic of China, 1993: Chang Cheh)** - Perhaps Chang Cheh's last movie, *Ninja in Ancient China* has a seriously good action quotient but sadly suffers from several technical flubs and confusing editing.

A Taoist master by the name of Yu is introduced as the master of Chinese 'five element' ninjas (sounds familiar!). He is also a healer and all-around swell guy with a horrifyingly yellow smock. Unfortunately, this is the early part of Chinese history leading up to the Three Kingdoms and subjugation is afoot. General Suen-Chak is a hardened warrior and rather brutal administrator but also displays (on occasion) a soft side. Unfortunately for Taoist Yu, it doesn't include the rebels Yu and his students have trained. Suen-Chak goes after and kills Yu and hangs him in front of the fortress. His students seek revenge, of course, and to do it requires subterfuge to reach the General's inner circle. I won't give away too much more but it's a Chang Cheh film, so blood and death with as side dish of honor are on the menu.

Well, first the bad news. Though filmed in 1993, it has a print that looks more like early 1970's with squiggles occasionally popping up. Not so bad in itself, but the subtitles are burned in and hard to read at times due to their placement in the frame. Compounding that is the rather confusing translation that will throw even some *used* to poor translations. That subject itself could be a whole review! Audio is ok but volume comes in and out at times.

The editing is done in such a way to make you feel like you missed 4 or 5 seconds of action at certain points during the film. Not a show stopper, but annoying anyways. The movie feels confusing at times when it deals with the machinations of politics and war; names and places come in and out of conversation, but honestly it is hard to keep up or care when the translation is as poor as it is. Ultimately, the war and politics are merely a backdrop for the main revenge plot. And heroic ninja bloodshed. At least in this movie, the ninjas are the protagonists.

The good news? Action is hot and gets better as it goes on. Much better than the 1983 **Five Element Ninjas** in my opinion (even though that movie is classic in it's own right). The ninjas are fun to watch as colored smoke billows up and ninjas fly up into the air (reminiscent of the more far-fetched ninja movies out there). But everyone in Taoist Yu's cadre kicks serious ass and when it gets down to fights, I was floored. A nice combination of wushu, northern styles, wuxia, and ninja weaponry blends together in a startlingly fast and often visceral combination. Standouts include the young student who infiltrates the General's staff and the General himself (apologies but right now haven't figured out some of the main cast yet). The cast as a whole is remarkable for the quality and talent level. Other things I liked were the historical setting (a period which has some interesting garb), the mainland locations (with a suitably badass fortress), and the action (did I say that already?). The choreography was awesome and Tung Chi Hua is on my list to watch for.

Despite my misgivings about the technical stuff, I don't mean to imply that it is Greenfan's fault for any of that. Great liner notes and extras show the commitment they have for putting this somewhat rare film back out in circulation. A big hand goes out to them for this effort. Ultimately, it is a definite recommend for the diehard kungfu fan, but not so much for the casual kungfu grazer.

**Ninja in the Claws of the CIA (Hong Kong, 1981: John Liu) - aka Ninja vs. the USA; In the Claws of the CIA; Kung Fu Emanuelle** - Have you ever sat down to watch *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) and found yourself thinking, this would be so much better with random kung fu and soft-core porn scenes thrown in every few minutes? Well, obscure martial arts triple-threat John Liu made just the movie for you with *In the Claws of the C.I.A.* a.k.a. *Ninja in the Claws of the C.I.A.* (though the hero is not a ninja) a.k.a. *Kung Fu Emmanuelle*, on account of copious, often hilarious soft-core action. Nicknamed "Flash Legs" on account of his lethal kicks, John Liu found cult stardom in kung fu flicks like *The Secret Rivals* (1972) and *Incredible Kung Fu Mission* (1979). *In the Claws of the C.I.A.* was one of three films Liu wrote, directed and distributed through his own production company.

Oddly, the film kicks off with a gun battle showcasing Danny Lee, star of *Super Infra-Man* (1975) and *The Killer* (1989), one suspects was spliced from a different movie. The story proper begins with a political assassination that spurs martial arts trained C.I.A. agent Sanders (Christian Anders) to seek help from his prank-loving Chinese sifu, Mr. Chan (Gam Biu). Too busy frolicking poolside with bikini babes (and, somewhat unsettlingly, speedo-clad boys too!), Chan steers Sanders in the direction of John Liu. Seemingly portraying himself, Liu is an embittered Vietnam war veteran turned world champion kung fu master and movie star who has developed his own unique fighting style called Zen Kwan Do.

Through a ridiculously convoluted set-up involving real life Playboy Playmate Yolanda Egger posing as a tantalizing damsel in distress in a very skimpy bikini, Sanders attempts to entrap John into training an elite martial arts unit for the C.I.A. At first our hero sensibly refuses but is won over by the star-spangled patriotism of his crippled twin brother (!) James (John Liu again) who still proudly serves the military. So John joins the C.I.A. at a secret base where he sparks up a soft-focus, soft-core romance with intelligence operative Caroline (Spanish horror regular Mirta Miller) and sets about training unlikely field agents Johnny (chop-sockey favourite Casanova Wong) and Susan, who keeps wandering around in her underwear making less than subtle passes at our stoic lead. In a frankly none too easily deciphered sub-plot, wacky Mr. Chan keeps an undercover agent spying on various bizarre C.I.A. training techniques including electro-shock therapy. When this agent threatens to quit Chan fakes his own death which somehow spurs the would-be turncoat to get back on the job. When John discovers the C.I.A. are using radio-waves to turn their men into kill-crazed psychos, or in Susan's case a ravenous nympho who dry-humps a tree, he and Carolyn go on the run with a case full of secret files.

Unfortunately John and Caroline choose the scenic route via yacht so they can shag on deck unaware of an ambush by frogmen assassins. It's a fatal goodbye for Caroline. When John reaches Paris, France (with a scene of him practicing Zen Kwan Do moves in front of the Eiffel Tower, just to prove he really did film there), he abruptly becomes guardian to Caroline's hitherto unmentioned little daughter, beating up would-be assassins whilst the

adorable imp cries: "Punch him out, Uncle John!" Before we can get our heads around that plot twist another abrupt jump-cut introduces yet another love interest in foxy French chick Gisete (Raquel Evans) who has yet another kid, this time a boy, equally enamoured with Uncle John. Inept C.I.A. agents attempt to kidnap Gisette and her son but are foiled by a trio of Chinese female martial arts experts wearing identical jade jumpsuits. Who the hell are they? God knows. Gorgeous Gisete straddles John Liu for yet another sex scene whereupon, having sated fans of gratuitous nudity, she and her equally anonymously glamorous friend take a bullet. That's two children orphaned in one movie. Nice going, John. A distraught John promptly hides in a trailer park where he befriends yet another little boy (watch out, kid!), disguises himself as his twin and eventually faces off with evil agent Pascho (real-life karate champion Roger Paschy) and the rest of the C.I.A. in a surprisingly impassioned, suspenseful finale that incorporates tasteless mondo footage of a real air crash and a quote from Casablanca (1942).

In the Claws of the C.I.A. hails from an odd period in Hong Kong cinema when the industry was making an awkward transition from the lavish yet increasingly starchy productions of the Shaw Brothers era and the slicker contemporary works exemplified by brash Eighties studios like Cinema City, Golden Harvest and D&B Films. A lot of strange, cheap and cheerful chop-sockey indie efforts popped up in the interim with John Liu's surreal vanity project among the most bizarre. Fans familiar with his earlier opus, Zen Kwan Do Strikes Paris (1979) wherein John's NASA scientist father is kidnapped by enemy agents, will know better than to take the supposedly autobiographical plot (!) at face value. It is a ridiculous albeit compellingly odd mish-mash of a movie mixing spy thriller clichés, bizarre attempts at comedy, comic book science fiction, silly sex scenes and shameless steals from Enter the Dragon (1973) and even The Dirty Dozen (1967) as badass military man John whips his young team into shape including hilarious hippie Casanova Wong. Yet at the same time Liu mounts a disarmingly sincere satirical exposé of strange C.I.A. training techniques and dirty tricks not too dissimilar from some scenes in The Men Who Stare At Goats (2009).

Of course one of the more questionable aspects of the satire is how oddly obsessed the C.I.A. are with testing John Liu's sex drive. Their inexplicable efforts culminate in a near-legendary scene where John uses his mystical mastery of Tai Chi to restrain himself while Susan performs fellatio. Running a close second is the scene where a brain-washed Johnny rebuffs John's gift of a cute pet bunny whereupon his squad rip the poor rabbit to pieces. Yikes. Liu's haphazard direction seems to suffer from A.D.D. and renders the would-be complex plot into an incomprehensible blur. Trash film fans will likely feel satisfied as his camera leers at every scantily-clad Playboy playmate that happens by and frames the odd arresting action scene. For all the film's other failings, both Liu's impressive athletic prowess and that of co-star Casanova Wong are well showcased. Note Pascho's odious defense of agency tactics: "When brave men are fighting to protect democracy, the occasional innocent gets caught in the crossfire." To which John Liu responds with a righteous slow-motion kick in the face. Beat that, Redford.

**Ninja in the Deadly Trap (Taiwan, 1981: Kuo Chi) - aka Hero Defeating Japs** - Although the Venoms had officially disbanded and left Shaw Brothers Studios, key members of the troupe (Kuo Chui, Lu Feng, Chiang Sheng) returned to Taiwan and continued to make movies. The first of these, 'Ninja in the Deadly Trap', was Kuo Chui's first attempt at directing; an experience he described as 'thoroughly exhausting' in an interview in Eastern Heroes magazine in the late nineties.

The remaining Venoms play three kung fu students in a plot with echoes of their first big break movie 'Five Deadly Venoms'. Although the three trained under the same master they have never met and would only be able to recognise each other through secret hand signals. After an attempt on his life by Japanese ninja the emperor (Ti Lung) sends out his son to find the three students as they are trained to combat ninja techniques. This quest turns out to be extremely perilous as ninjas seem to be hiding around every corner or behind every tree. The emperor's son succeeds in rounding up the students and persuades them to help. The four then set off to strike at the very heart of the ninja operation.

Although the budget doesn't stretch to the luxurious sets typical of the Venoms' Shaw Brothers' movies (most of the fight scenes are staged in outdoor locations) the fight choreography doesn't suffer at all. Again we're treated to one spellbinding fight after another. Its the combination of speed, agility, precision timing and rhythm that makes their fights so mesmerising. The film's spectacular climax sees the trio battle wave after wave of ninjas until they reach the chief played by Yusasaki Kurata.

Kuo Chui's direction is impressive throughout and its not hard to see why his skills as an action director are now in demand worldwide.

**Ninja in the Dragon's Den (Hong Kong, 1982: Corey Yuen)** - It is also a shame that this martial art extravaganza does not have a proper North American release. This is the debut of both director Corey Yuen and buff martial artist Conan Lee (who only had a small career unfortunately) in this period martial art film. The choreography, which

included a fight on stilts, lots of ninja traps, Hwang Jang-lee with his awesome kicking prowess and much more. Surprisingly the film's cinematography looks exquisite. The lighting and composition are sometimes surprisingly charismatic and have been thought out well. This also portrays several good Japanese characters which is quite rare in Hong Kong cinema including the lone ninja Sanada Hiroyuki (who I have seen recently in 2013 films *47 Ronin* and *The Wolverine* and his performance in *The Twilight Samurai* is one of my favorites.) If I had a martial arts label, I would put this film out.

I am a little surprised by the good, but not great reviews I read on HKMDB. I know Conan Lee character is probably a bit too cocky without ever really getting his ego busted (a big difference from the Jackie Chan films at that time) and he is sometimes overly violent without necessarily needing to be (even with his friends, a joke he pulls on Tai Bo is quite close to actually killing him), but still I had so much fun with the action scenes, the ninja scenes (I tend to love houses like that, reminds me I should probably turn off some of my traps in the basement) and how professional the cinematography looked that this is going on my top 100 Hong Kong films.

**Ninja Over the Great Wall (Hong Kong, 1987: Bruce Le) – aka Fire on the Great Wall; Shaolin Fist of Fury** - This represents something of an achievement for Brucesploitation actor Bruce Le. After more than 10 years of Brucesploitation that were by turns bland and forgettable or sleazy and forgettable, he finally got it. He finally understood what was necessary to make an honest-to-God good film. He finally learned something about the power of images that weren't naked Eurosmut starlets, and finally honed his skills to be able choreograph fights that would not be completely forgotten 15 minutes after the movie ended. Things just clicked for him in the late 80s, when he was making an honest effort to be seen as a legitimate filmmaker. As it stands, *Ninja Over the Great Wall* is quite possible the best Brucesploitation movie I've so far seen, even if there are others out there that might be a lot more fun to watch.

The film opens in 1931 in the Northernmost regions of China, probably around Manchuria. A contingent of Japanese troops arrive in some random village and just start opening fire on the villagers for no reason whatsoever. After witnessing the murder of his mother, kung fu expert Chi Keung (Bruce Le) takes his girlfriend Yip and makes a break for it. The butt of a Japanese rifle makes short work of their flight, and Chi Keung is put on a truck with the rest of the surviving men of the village. They're taken out of town, systematically slaughtered, and thrown into a mass grave. Yip finds Chi Keung, who's barely alive, and escapes with him to Beijing. The entire scene is played out with the minimum of dialog, with Le wisely letting the imagery, especially that of the two protagonists walking through a literal boneyard, to make it to safety.

A year later, Chi Keung is working as a rickshaw puller in Beijing when he meets Master Yeung (Yue Hai, of the *Shaolin Temple* films). Keung has been challenged to a duel by Shojiro (Yasuyoshi Shikamura, also known as Luk Chuen), the son of the Japanese ambassador based in Beijing. Shojiro is a powerful, but idealistic martial artist, who believes in things like mercy and fairness, much to his father's disapproval. His dad thinks that the duel is a bad idea, so he sends his ninja army to fix Master Yeung. Chi-Keung saves the Master's life and comes into his good graces. Later on, Master Yeung loses the duel to Shojiro, and later dies after being poisoned by the ninja bodyguards.

Chi Keung is enraged by the treachery of the Japanese, and takes on Shojiro, giving him a sound thrashing. Shojiro retreats to Japan to hone his Bushido skills, while his father lets loose his ninja army to wipe out the rest of the Chung-Hwa School and kill Chi Keung as well. Chi Keung escapes and makes it to a settlement along the Yellow River, where he trains for the inevitable rematch with his Japanese adversary.

The truth is that the film revolves mainly around the rivalry between Shojiro and the Chinese masters, exemplified by both Chi Keung and Master Yeung. As a result, there are several subplots that pop up and simply disappear without being mentioned again. We discover that the archtypical Chinese interpreter is actually the uncle of Yip, Chi Keung's love interest, but that fact never facts into the story. There's also a love triangle sidestory involving Chi Keung, Yip, and some girl who lives in the Yellow River village, but that's resolved in a simplistic manner. Also, there's a bit about the top student of the Chung Hwa school travelling to the South to rally up the kung fu masters to oppose the Japanese, but once he leaves, that's never mentioned again.

The film also suffers from some bad editing, mainly during a 10-minute interval in which Chi Keung faces off with the ninjas in four or five consecutive fights. No explanation is given for the change of scenery or time of day in between the fights, especially when Chi Keung is suddenly in the snow fighting off a ninja dressed in white. Moreover, once the ninja off the students of the school, we never see Chi Keung's reaction to it.

But I'm willing to forgive those flaws because the rest of the movie is handled so well. Unlike so many other Brucesploitation movies I've seen, this actually *\*feels\** like a real movie. The emotions are real, the characters feel like people, and the production values are better than your average Brucesploitation romp. I'm pretty sure that much of the film was made with Mainland money, considering the cast and the location shooting. When you get

right down to it, this film feels like a respectable marriage of the Bruceploitation, Ninjasploitation and Mainland wushu film genres.

Interestingly enough, even the villain experiences some degree of character development. Shojiro has the typical Japanese desire to prove that Bushido beats Kung Fu, but he wants to do it in an honorable way and believes in a fair fight, much like Norman Tsui's character in [b]Duel to the Death[/b]. This is one of the few films I've seen where the villain gets beaten, and then retreats to train for the climatic fight. By the end of his training, Shojiro has absorbed his master's teachings that showing mercy is not part of Bushido, making him all the more dangerous as a foe.

I'm pretty sure that the opening massacre has a lot to do with the revelations in the 1980s of the activities of infamous Unit 731, the prisoner camp in Manchuria where Japanese doctors and scientists performed some of the most horrible experiments on record on living people (most of whom were Chinese). Huang Kin-Lung must have had strong feelings about these hideous acts that came to light, as he also directed the film [b]Comfort Women[/b], which is about prostitutes being sent to Unit 731 after contracting venereal diseases. I get the feeling that Bruce Le wanted to show to the world just how bad things got in China during the Japanese occupation.

The action is pretty solid for the most part. Huang Kin-Lung eschews much of the hopping, nunchaku-swinging, whoop-whooping, and nose-thumbing that defined so many other of his films. He uses a lot of reverse punches and his kicks are higher and more powerful than those sloppy low-altitude boots that cheapened the action in *Clones of Bruce Lee*, for example. Yue Hai gives us some tai chi and other internal styles during his big fight with Shojiro. On the weapons front, Bruce Le shows off his sword skills with the katana in several of the fights, wielding it like a Chinese jian, and then opting for a pair of escrima-esque poles for the final fight.

I'd say the big flaw in the action is the final fight. It starts really good (by Bruce Le standards, anyway), with two fighting with weapons. It reminds me a lot of the final fight in *Fearless* to be honest. In fact, there are several scenes (the poisoning, Shojiro's reaction to his father's treachery) that remind me of *Fearless*. When the two switch to hand-to-hand fighting, it goes well. But then, the two are quickly reduced to haymakers and reverse punches, without any interesting choreography to complement it. The two fighters just mindlessly wail on each other until both are tired and bloody. A little more choreography from Huang Kin-Lung would've been nice. But despite that and those flaws, I still think this is Bruce Le's best contribution to cinema.

**Ninja: The Final Duel - (Taiwan, 1986: Robert Tai)** - Robert Tai follows up the excellent 'Shaolin Vs Ninja' with possibly his maddest creation ever, literally packed to the brim with 'over the top' fight action. Apparently more than 11 hours of footage was shot and released as a series but here we get some of the highlights crammed into a 90 minute version.

Continuing the story of 'Shaolin vs Ninja', the ninja clan are not prepared to take their defeat lying down and set out on a mission to ....err..... destroy Shaolin. Meanwhile the Japanese Buddhist monks, who challenged Shaolin in the first film, decide to send their best man, Alexander Lo Rei (batting for the other side this time), to learn Shaolin's secrets. That's all you need to know really as the film launches into one more mad fight after another.

Ooh... almost forgot, to mention the ninja water spider assault team; one of the strangest ideas I've seen in a kung fu movie. Given a bit more money then I'm sure they could have been really impressive but they do at least add entertainment value.

Despite the low budget, 'Ninja the Final Duel' is still hugely entertaining with some fantastically choreographed fight sequences. Alexander Lo Rei is simply superb but is matched by Li Yi Min in one of his last film appearances. Both of them have numerous battles, often with multiple opponents, and get to show great martial arts and athletic ability. Robert Tai also seemed keen to give opportunity to western martial artists who all cope extremely well with the demanding pace of the fight scenes. Eugene T. Trammel's (as the black monk from Brooklyn) fight on a beach against half a dozen ninjas is one of the highlights as is Sylvio Azzolini's highly intricate tamborine fight with Li Yi Min.

Undercranking does feature quite heavily but the fight scenes are so complex that they remain impressive. There's also plenty of wire work in which Robert Tai builds on his pioneering work in earlier films. This is a good five years before wirework was to take off in Hong Kong and shows Robert Tai as a true pioneer.

Probably the most famous scene from the entire film is when Alice Tseng faces a number of ninjas while completely stark naked. It might not be the best choreographed fight scene ever made (although its not bad) but has a charm all of its own. And its completely in keeping with the tone of the rest of this mad film.

**Ninja Vs Bruce Lee (Hong Kong, 1982: Joseph Kong)** – aka **Concorde of Bruce** - It's Joseph Kong and co-conspirators trying to squeeze more out of Bruceploitation (copying the traits and content of Bruce Lee's movies was more of a

70s thing) by exploiting themselves. What that means is that *Ninja Vs. Bruce Lee* is a cut and paste job, made up of footage from *My Name Called Bruce*, *Return Of Bruce* and even *Enter The Game Of Death* (the one out of the bunch not directed by Kong). All aboard the incoherency-train. The new plot, sans any ninjas (unless you count the hooded figures in the *My Name Called Bruce*-footage) is muddled yet basic enough in order to act as a springboard for the large volume of fight footage taken from multiple productions. Therefore we get our star Le sporting various looks, echoing character design of Bruce Lee from *The Way Of The Dragon*, *Game Of Death* etc but there's really only one enjoyable factor here. Because the fight choreography may be plentiful but rarely stands out. But it's the idea in itself, that this movie would even be conjured up that us fans of shameless exploitation enjoy. It might not be level-headed but it certainly passes the time and the true variety of fighters versus Le is at least notable in this version. Even if they are nowhere near able to copy the sound action traits during Bruce Lee's shortened career.

**Ninja vs. Shaolin Guards (Taiwan, 1984: Chang Chi, Robert Tai)** - The chief eunuch is sent to Shaolin to remove the abbot and obtain a sacred relic; the Golden Sutra. The abbot is killed but four loyal monks, led by Alexander Lo Rei, manage to escape with the artefact and set off on a mission to take it to Tibet. Along the way they face numerous assassins all intent on obtaining the Sutra.

The plot is straightforward but engaging enough and there is some level of character development, especially concerning the relationship between one of the monks and his cousin, May, who he is secretly in love with.

The film features stunning fight scenes from the very beginning. The credit sequence sees a superb kicking display from Han Ying but this is soon surpassed by numerous Opera influenced fight scenes that are as intricate as any other. Nice touches come in the form of slow motion sequences and very effective editing and also with the subtle use of wirework.

This is another one of those films with a breathtaking climactic fight scene that just pushes the film over the edge as Alexander Lo Rei and Han Ying battle it out. The action is fast paced without appearing undercranked and includes plenty of acrobatics mixed with the incredible martial arts.

**None But The Brave (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Wei)** - Everyone involved should feel pretty blessed Shaw Brother's star Cheng Pei-Pei is present in this Golden Harvest production as Lo Wei (and Raymond Chow's) intentions simply seems to be creating a *Fist Of Fury* re-thread. Part of a revolutionary group, Cheng poses as the sister of an important Chinese official (Au Wai) in order to gain access and freedom for her fellow comrades. Despite Han Ying-Chieh's often dull choreography, Cheng's intensity in the fighting stakes is there and moving on to Lo Wei's direction, his actress rises above and beyond what's logically required of her. Lo is typically lazy, showing off that his decent set design exists but cinematically it's often about shooting distanced dialogue without any flair for even that. Cheng is quite present though, moving swiftly between intensity and putting on the mask of an ignorant peasant. Though no acting looks to be truly challenging, Au Wai does carry himself well as it's an official we don't know is looking resigned out of doubt about his political stance on things or if the shell holds evil. But Lo Wei creates little tension and although the 2 hour running time (English dub version was cut by close to 30 minutes) is very much bearable, Cheng Pei-Pei is the sole showcase of *None But The Brave*. Heck, 30 minutes more of her presence wouldn't have hurt either. That's how good she is. Lo Wei appears in support as well as James Tien and amongst the background players you'll spot Jackie Chan, Yuen Wah, Corey Yuen and Chin Yuet-Sang.

**Notorious Eight, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Sun Chung)** - An interesting idea, in which the rules of kung fu movies are transferred to the gambling genre, fails to live up to its potential in this lacklustre drama. Even with the casting of kung fu legends Lo Lieh and Chen Kwan Tai, opposite each other, 'The Notorious Eight' never really feels as if it is moving above a pedestrian pace.

The last surviving members of an ancient gambling sect, known as (you guessed it 'The Notorious Eight') and led by Chen Kwan Tai, resolve to get revenge against gambling underworld kingpin Lo Lieh for causing the death of one of their number. A series of gambling contests begins, which is interesting enough, however there is far too much padding inbetween and, worst of all, the tension that is built in the final scene is destroyed by a throwaway ending. A shame because up to that point, the gambling finale is genuinely gripping.

While obviously influenced by the kung fu genre, there is no kung fu in this movie and very little action at all. The one saving grace is that Lo Lieh at least makes a good villain but this isn't really enough.

**Oath Of Death (Hong Kong, 1971: Pao Hsueh-Li)** - A more lean, basic version of a template seen subsequent in Chang Cheh's *The Blood Brothers*, this movie's sworn brothers are torn apart and betrayal and bloodshed follows as one turns power-hungry. With basic and stripped down comes a lot of elegant looking fun as Pao Hsueh-Li completes and executes. Combine powerful and very cool action (including the usage of a whip and its technique, which will come back as a signature-move), Tien Feng as a dependable villain and a continual focus on not just bloody but primal action. *Oath Of Death* turns angry but not pessimistic. But the plentiful blood-spurts, dismemberments and beheadings makes sure we have fun with very adult material (cue some nudity too) though. Bound to drown amidst the Shaw Brothers output, simple and direct is still a major strength for *Oath Of Death*. Also starring Lo Lieh, Wai Wang and Ling Ling.

**Odd Couple, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Lau Kar-Wing)** - aka **The Eternal Conflict** - Two old rivals, Sammo Hung and Lau Kar-wing meet every 10 years to find out whose weaponry skills are better. These duels always end up in a draw and as the two warriors are aging they decide to each take on a pupil so that the duel may continue. The most interesting part is Sammo also plays Lau's student and Lau at the same time plays Sammo's student. In the end before the rivalry students come to an ultimate duel just as their mentors have done in the past, they must unite to defeat a common foe. Incredible and brilliant fight scenes ensue.

This movie is often brought up in many of the kung fu related forums, whenever someone ask for recommendations on some of the best weapon movies to watch. As the back of the DVD cover on this HKL release states, "Experience possibly the GREATEST weapons movie ever made", I concur with this statement.

This movie has one of the most classic, entertaining openings of all the kung fu movies I have seen so far. We are introduced to 18 traditional weapons of Chinese martial arts training, (well at least in the film) as well as demonstrations of the sword and spear conducted by Sammo Hung and Lau Kar Wing, CLASSIC! The story in this movie is basically about a the "King of the Sword" (King of Sabres) and "King of the Spear" meeting annually for a friendly contest to see who is the best, numero uno. The two characters played by Sammo and Lau have been meeting once a year for 15 years, and each contest always ends in a draw. They then decide to find a student that they would teach all of their kung fu skills to, and then to have the students fight each other in ten years time, to once and for all find out who is the best of the best. Sammo and Lau each play 2 characters in this movie, the older masters, and the younger students. There are other characters introduced, side story lines playing out, but the Sammo and Lau characters are the main focus of the movie. This movie is really beyond GREAT, the action alone is worthy of multiple viewings, a highly recommended movie to any and all kung fu movie fans, particularly fans of kung fu weapon movies. A Must See!

Comedy, YES. Quite a few of the characters in the movie delivers comedic dialogue and/or physical comedy. Sammo's performance for the most part was the funniest, he really had some LOL moments. Dean Shek's was the least comical, I didn't really find his character or scenes very funny, I really could of did without him or his character in the movie. Even if you made a home-made Dean Shek FREE edited version of this movie, you would not be missing anything needed in the telling of this story. Sammo with such perfect comedic timing, really delivers some truly funny moments in this movie. Lau Kar Wing also had a few laughable scenes. This movie is definitely a half comedy and half kung fu movie. All you comedy haters, be warned. At the same time I still have to recommend this film to you if you have never seen it, the action in this movie outweighs any bad humor or attempts of humor in this film.

Action, Action, and more Action. This movie is loaded with nothing less the extraordinary kung fu fighting and weapon play. I don't know if I can personally think of another movie with such extremely intricate while at the same time entertaining fight scenes, maybe only the end battle of the Shaw Bros classic *Legendary Weapons of China*. The training scenes where either Sammo was training a young Lau, or Lau was training a young Sammo, were both entertaining and funny. While I should have plenty to say regarding the action in this film, I found myself at a loss for words in trying to get across how incredible the fight scenes really were in this movie, you really must see it for yourself. While one fight scene had very noticeable use of undercranking, the majority of the rest seemed to have very minimal use of this camera trickery.

Since the 2 main, well 4 main characters in this movie which were played by Sammo or Lau were of friendly contest, there really was no killing involved in most of the fights or training scenes. The few deaths that took place in the film, didn't really display all too much of the 'red stuff'.

Without a doubt, Sammo Hung and Lau Kar Wing did their thing. Playing 2 characters each, and each character delivering unbelievable performances, they get my vote for the most Standout Performances. In a way, they each had a bigger role in this movie, Lau Kar Wing was the director, while both Lau and Sammo helped out as action



choreographers. While some of the comedic attempts fell short and were not all that funny, this movie stands out amongst most others, for the pure entertaining 5 star performance and action scenes by both Sammo Hung and Lau Kar Wing. I have to give honorable mention to Mr. Beardy himself, Leung Kar Yan. He is one of my personal favorites, and his character in this movie was a definite highlight of the film. Great Villain.

Buy this movie, and you will not be sorry, well at least from the kung fu action standpoint. Even though some of you may not be too fond of the hybrid movies that mix comedy and kung fu, the action in this movie is a must see and can not be missed.

**Ode to Gallantry (Hong Kong, 1982: Chang Cheh)** - The second-to-last "Venoms" film. Kuo Chue takes on an amazing dual role and the complications and kung-fu which ensue are wonderful to watch. Even judged by exceptional "Venom" standards, this one stands out.

This was a fun little movie. This was more light-hearted than usual Chang Cheh movies. Kuo Chui plays two roles as a wanderer named if you can believe it, "Bastard" and a chief of a clan. This was not one of the most action packed Venoms movies, but it was entertaining nevertheless. Kuo Chui gives a good performance playing both of these roles. If you watched this movie, you saw that Lu Feng was not in this movie. He was not in this movie because he had a argument with Kuo Chui about action scenes and other stuff. So Chang Cheh took Kuo Chui out of 2 Champions of Shaolin and Lu Feng was taken out of this movie. Sun Chien was also in this movie. He was assistant to the chief. Wang Li gives perhaps his best performance as the man everyone fears. When they hear his name they flee. Cameo in this movie by Chiang Sheng, Chu Ko and Chang Tien Chi who were painted villains who fought with Kuo Chui at the end. This was enjoyable movie and one that I liked.

There was some comedic moments. For example, Kuo Chui running away from Wang Li's character after he killed many people. It was also the way he ran that was funny. Kuo Chui was also falling all over the place while practicing swordplay. His facial expressions were also humorous.

The action is pretty good, even though there is not a lot compared to other Venom films.

Kuo Chui was good playing dual roles. He did a very good job. He is my standout performer. There were also good performances by Wang Li, Tang Ching and Liu Hui Ling.

**Of Cooks And Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1979: Ting Chung)** - Straight of the bat, here is my issue with the film. It's not so much the films fault as it is a fault with my viewing habits, but I have seen this plotline played out a hundred times before and I can think of many films where I think it was executed well, and sadly, for me personally, Of Cooks and Kung Fu is not one of them.

Jacky Chen (really?) plays Tan Tan your typical lovable arse wipe, spending his days burning food in the countryside and learning Cookery Kung Fu from his uncle, who at one point was the king of chefs. Tan Tan and his uncle eventually have to fight for survival against an impeccably dressed super villain who is going from village to village, killing all the chefs he can find.

Literally the opposite of leaving a tip.

I am by no means saying it's a poor plot line, it isn't. What it is, is a plot we have seen before, tweaked slightly, given a gloss of paint and slapped on top of some very good fight scenes. I'm trying not to slate it too much, I love these kind of films, but all the formula plot threads are there, including our protagonist losing his parents at a young age. Overall, I would describe the plot as standard and feel it doesn't stand out amongst the crowd of Kung Fu being made at the time.

As always with these types of films, I love the almost robotic, endlessly psychotic main villain, who wastes no time in dispatching helpless cooks on route to finding the king of chefs. This character is portrayed exactly how you would expect and this I don't have any problem with. He is there to serve a purpose and he serves it well.

I did however, take issue with how weak I felt the relationship between master and student was, or in this films case, uncle and nephew.

It wasn't particularly bad, I just felt as if it was almost non existent at times, possibly due to a lack of chemistry between the uncle and Tan Tan.

And that leads me to Tan Tan. I am not knocking Jacky Chen as a screen fighter but I honestly thought he had very little presence outside the fight scenes. At times his character was incredibly annoying and I didn't feel as though the character had any natural progression throughout the film, he remained irritating between fights and then before you know it, showdown time. The rest of the cast were fine, but nothing notable happening in the character department.

This is clearly the film's strength and appeal and I am pleased to report that it plays to its strengths, at least in actual combat. The cookery style of kung fu is mentioned a lot, but doesn't differ too much from the norm, although it is an interesting gimmick nonetheless, at least in name sake. The fights are plentiful and are great to watch and despite there being no particularly jaw dropping moments, they hold up well and were definitely the part of the film that shines above all else.

The final confrontation is excellent as always and Jacky Chen is a polished screen fighter, although he wasn't leading man material for me personally.

There are the usual prolonged exhibitions of the kung fu stances and styles and also the obligatory training sequence before the film's finale, although this seemed closer to synchronised dance than training.

All in all though, highly polished shapes and some great acrobatics are this film's saving grace. In summary I would say that on the surface this is your run of the mill martial arts film. Dig a little deeper and you'll be entertained with a host of great fight scenes which do more than enough to hold your attention throughout the film.

**On The Verge of Death (Taiwan, 1973: Li Fai-Mon) – aka Bruce Lee vs Frankenstein; Line of Death** - Well, if you like Yuen brothers madness, you'll like this. The movie has the kitchen sink- We have a One Armed Boxer/Swordsman, Roided up Bruce Lee clone, a deft Kung fu artist, a Young woman looking for revenge for her missing dad and her loyal servant. And that's just the good guys. For Bad guys we have thugs dressed as Zombies, a real zombie with super kung fu power and fangs, Japanese Mercenaries, and a slutty vixen who is a kung fu expert. From what I can tell, the writer/director only made a few movies, so he must have said "fuck it, I'll make a whole bunch of movies in one- horror, comedy, drama, revenge, and titillation, among other things". Oh, and the two main heroes are students of Huo Yuan Chia and Wang Wu, the Iron Body Guard, respectively. Joe Bob Briggs would have loved this movie, though it lacks a lot of gore.

The subtitles are hilarious, btw!

PS, the movie stars Hong Hoi, Tang Long and real life future Kung fu master Louis Linn, who is highly regarded in Europe. It also stars that guy from Fearless Hyena that teaches Jackie Chan the emotional fist.

**One-Armed Boxer (Taiwan, 1972: Jimmy Wang Yu)** - I am a big fan of the sequel *Master of the Flying Guillotine* (aka *One-armed Boxer vs. the Flying Guillotine* (1976)) which is one of my favorite martial art films of the 1970s. I finally got around to watching this one (unfortunately no good DVD of it exists in R1/R0; there is a Legendary Collection VCD of it though.) This was made in Taiwan, but co-produced and distributed by Hong Kong's Golden Harvest who were doing quite well during this year (Bruce Lee's beloved *Fist of Fury* had already been out earlier that year). Wang Yu's directed films do not always contain good martial artists nor exquisite story or direction, but there is always something fascinating and fun about them even though I notice he does repeat himself quite often.

The weakness of some of the martial artists is evident, especially with the "Thai" fighters (compare the Thai fighters here compared to the later Yu film *Return of the Chinese Boxer*) and Wang Yu's kicks (and punches) but with a coherent storyline, a large body-count and a plethora of fighters with various fighting styles this is a fun film. Wang Yu is the star pupil of his martial arts school who gets into fights to protect the weak, but also antagonizes a neighboring school of martial artists that want to take over the whole territory where they can operate their drugs and prostitution without resistance. Yu's embarrasses the thugs by beatdown and ultimately it leads them to outsource to a variety of hired fighters from Tibetan monks, several Japanese fighters including one with fangs (Lung Fei), Thai fighters and a yogi who fights on his hands. They are a surly lot. This leads to one of the basic patterns in martial art films: humiliation (of teacher and/or self), recovery, training and then revenge. Oh but what revenge.

**One-Armed Swordsman, The (Hong Kong, 1967: Chang Cheh)** - Though the *chambara* (Japanese swordplay film) influence on Chang Cheh was already seen in his previous film *The Magnificent Trio* (1966), a remake of Hideo Goshu's *Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964) (and quite possibly the earlier *Tiger Boy* (1966): however this film is not available anywhere on DVD so it is hard to comment on it), it would be *The One-Armed Swordsman* (獨臂刀) that would help define Cheh as an auteur with his own blend of Japanese action aesthetics, American rebellious characters and Chinese wuxia heroes. This film would not only be the first film to break the 1 million HK dollars barrier it would also be a watershed moment for the area's cinema. The popularity of this film as well as King Hu's hit the year before *Come Drink With Me* helped push in a new era of Mandarin language movies as well as push out the indigenous language Cantonese cinema for several years. But it would be the brutal style of Chang that would dominate the regional efforts and not the Peking Opera influenced King Hu (it also did not help Hu that he was a much slower at making films than Chang). This movie would also be the first in the subgenre of "one-armed" films that stereotyped the career of the star of this movie Jimmy Wang Yu.

Wang Yu had already acted in a couple of Chang Cheh films, but it is his performance here as Fang Gang that would make him a star in Hong Kong. Fang is an orphan whose father had perished saving the life of Qi Ru-feng (Tien Feng: King Boxer (1972)). Qi shows his gratefulness by taking on Fang as a student. Fang also obtains the broken sword that was used by his father, but it could not possibly be of any use. He quickly becomes an adept student that because of his success and austereness has earned the ire of not only a couple of rich students, but also with Qi Pei-er (Pan Ying-zi: *The Magnificent Trio*), the daughter of the sifu, when he rebukes her advances. It is usually a bad idea to turn down your teacher's daughter and in this film it is no exception.

Fang's skill level is so advanced that he toys with the other students and Pei-er when they intend on teaching him a lesson. He completely outclasses them with his masculine masterful display of martial arts. However, since he is only toying with them he lets his guard down not expecting that the petulant daughter will exact her revenge by cutting off his right arm. It is not difficult to see this as a castration allegory for not only embarrassing her in the fight, but also not returning her affections.

Blooded and broken, Fang stumbles off leaving a crimson trail (while not bloody by later Shaw Brothers standards, this was quite gory for its time) until he gets found and saved by orphan Xiao Man (Lisa Chiao Chiao: *The Assassin* (1967)) who hates the world of martial arts because it led to the death of her father. Yet when Fang wakes from his shock induced slumber, later gets beat up by a couple of ruffians, falls into a deep doleful state she takes pity on him and gives him her father's manual of martial arts. While part of the manual is missing it luckily has the "left-arm" portions. A few days later he is an accomplished one-armed fighter. Obviously it is unrealistic that in a short time he could lose an arm and then become an accomplished fighter (and one scene of him displaying his power of chi should probably have been trimmed as it really does not seem to fit in with the rest of the film) this treatment is probably copasetic with the Jin Yong novel *The Return of the Condor Heroes* (1959, 神雕俠侶) that the movie is influenced by.

Meanwhile Qi Ru-feng has decided that he is going to retire from the martial arts world at the age of 55. With all of his success as a swordsman he has created many enemies. Two brothers Smiling Tiger Cheng Tian Shou (Tang Ti) and Long-Armed Devil (called this because of his whip played effectively by the ubiquitous Yeung Chi-hing) have devised a way to destroy him and it involves a weapon that can render Qi's Dao sword that his entire school uses useless. The lesson behind this is to always teach your students to be proficient in more than one weapon and do not always cling to one approach to fighting. With Qi's best student missing (in more ways than one), and his other disciples getting picked off, his reign as head of the martial arts world seems to be at an end.

Wang Yu gives a good performance as the stoic brooding loner who is a combination of a wuxia hero and James Dean. He is not the most adept martial artist though. His Narcissist nature angered many actors and gave way to mediocre performances in the 1970s and beyond. Because of this and his later exploits in Taiwanese triads his reputation has suffered quite a bit among Hong Kong cinema fans. For the most part I tend to agree with the critics and fanboys on this except for his most famous One-Armed roles he seemed born to play (even if he does have two arms).

While the influences of such Japanese films as the *Zatoichi* series (these were shown in Hong Kong; later there would even be a *Zatoichi Meets the One Armed Swordsman* (1971)) are strong on this movie, it still has uniqueness to it that interests me. This would be a highly influential film to the Hong Kong audience not only on technical issues such as it is one of the earliest uses (and overuses) of hand-held camera in HK, but in thematic elements as well. It is enjoyable to see the whole martial art world questioned and Fang's subjugation to his principles are reminiscent of a Randolph Scott character in a Budd Boetticher western. This movie would spawn several sequels, remakes and

retreads and certainly up the ante for use of blood packets, missing limbs and stomach slashes. While the action scenes might feel dated and might not be plentiful enough for some viewers, I still think it is one of the better Hong Kong films of the 1960s. It certainly is one of the most important.

**One Armed Swordsman Against Nine Killers (Taiwan, 1976: Hsu Tseng-Hung, Lee Jeong-Ho)** - The one armed swordsman is on the trail for 9 killers. His reasons are simple...revenge! This movie is the last of the one armed swordsman movies or so they say. Lo Lieh plays the villain in this movie as he usually to me is a better villain than any good guy he ever played. The back of the DVD box claims a surprise ending.

If you are familiar with the one armed swordsman movies then you should stay clear away from this one. THIS IS NOT PART OF THE ONE ARMED SWORDSMAN MOVIES....COULDN'T BE. Let me explain, The title does say One Armed Swordsman Vs 9 Killers, but the title looks like to be added in from Video Asia. The one armed swordsman? He doesn't even use his trusty blade he usually carries. At the beginning of the film he seems to have one arm but its the wrong one. In all of the one armed swordsman movies he is missing his right arm. In this one he's missing his left arm. Totally not consistent with what we know about him from the previous films. Another thing his name is not Wang but some other character I can't remember. The story is so simple and done many times before. Revenge. Yawn! The fights are so unrealistic too. He fights with one arm, no sword in hand, up against 6 guys at a time heavily armed to the teeth and he disposes them. NO WEAPON, ONE ARM ONLY. At least in the real one armed swordsman movies he uses his blade. This film is awful, really. Wang Yu wrote this film and it look like his ego was so big during those times that he forgot to at least make his character realistic. Throughout the film he's cocky and afraid of no one. There wasn't one time he was in actual danger. Now here's the biggie, the surprise ending. It seems in the final fight of the film Wang .....err, sorry not Wang, well whoever he is, loses his other arm. But then out of the blue his left arm appears. Throughout the film he's been acting like he had only one arm but he actually had the 2 arms but he was concealing the left arm for reasons not explained, you are left wondering.....what the f\*\*\*? Confused? Well to save us the confusion, stay clear of this film. This is obvious Jimmy Wang Yu's way of making his own one armed swordsman character. I guess he was getting sued by Shaw Bros for using the Wang Kung character in other films like the superior Zatoichi vs the One Armed Swordsman or THE One Armed Swordsmen (that's the film with David Chiang and Jimmy Wang Yu, both are playing the one armed swordsman characters they made famous in the Shaw Bros studios) These films are not from Shaw Bros but made by Wang Yu. I'm still wondering though....what the hell was this movies real title?

Unrealistic.....sure all Shaw Bros movies and other kung fu flicks are unrealistic.....but man this one takes the cake! Even when I smoke weed watching this film I get a bad taste. This is Jimmy Wang Yu's worst! Blood? sure. good? this is a very, very bad film. Trash express!

[No characters stand out]. All the films characters look likes they want to make a quick buck.

**One-Armed Swordsmen (Taiwan, 1976: Jimmy Wang Yu, David Chiang)** - Given Jimmy Wang Yu's legendary bad behaviour on sets, and David Chiang's long feud with Ti Lung, I've love to have been on the set of this Wang/Chiang team-up, which they produced, directed and starred in.

The plot, written by Ku Lung, is a wacky "mystery" involving a mysterious one-armed man killing a policeman (Chang Yi). Naturally, since legendary one-armed swordsmen Fong Ping (Wang Yu) and Lei Lee (David Chiang) both show up in town, both ordering ludicrously enormous meals at the taverns, they are suspect - not helping matters is the fact that the only witness to the crime is an especially dumb kid! Lo Lieh, as Hua The Fox, is gloating and manipulating from the sidelines and gets most of the film's best lines.

The two stars are ammusingly yin and yang: Wang Yu overplaying his Clint Eastwood impression so monotonely his dubber has to speak in slow motion (and a New York accent), whilst David Chiang is lively and entertaining as usual. Besides Lo, we get antagnoistic support from Han Ying Cheih (as an inkeeper with a deadly abacus), some looney ghost bandits, Lung Fei and San Mao (as Shaolin monks) and our mystery villian, who gets a final death speech that is really hilarious - the perfect combination of Shakespeare and Scooby Doo villianous send-offs.

**One Foot Crane (Taiwan, 1979: Wu Min-Hsiung)** - During the Ming Dynasty, four bandits storm the manor of Fong Ting-Wei and slaughter his entire family. Only Fong's baby son is spared. But unbeknownst to the killers, the youngest daughter Lin-I, was hiding during the massacre. Wandering alone in the woods, Lin-I is found by a kind kung fu master, who teaches her the crane style. About ten years later, Lin-I (now played by Lily Li) is now a wandering swordswoman known as "One Foot Crane" who goes around protecting the oppressed while looking for her family's killers. Finding out that the four bandits are still wanted by authorities, she officially takes on the job to bring them in. She is helped from afar by police captain Chow Lung-Han (Sze-Ma Lung) and eventually by her brother (Barry Chan), who was adopted by one of the bandits.

Much like director Wu Min-Hsiung's *Green Dragon Inn*, this film is an agreeable kung fu actioner with a healthy dose of solid, if not quite memorable action. Powerful female characters mark both films, although this time our heroine is played by Lily Lee instead of Polly Shang Kuan Ling Feng. Like the best Chinese movies, nobody is safe when it comes to "who may or may not get killed", which keeps us on our feet throughout the movie's running time. The movie falters a little when Lin-I is gravely injured, since it takes her a while before we see her in action again (something similar happened in *Broken Oath*), but overall it was a satisfying film.

Animal Styles:

- The Crane Style - Lily Li - There are two major Crane systems out there, being the Tibetan White Crane System and the Fujian White Crane System. From what I've seen and read, they can be distinguished by their movements, as the latter has shorter, more closed attacks, with the arms never venturing too far from the torso. The former has wider, more sweeping strikes. From the looks of Lily Li's moves, she's using the Tibetan White Crane style, which would make sense, since the Fujian White Crane wasn't founded until the Qing Dynasty. The main problem here is that Lily Li doesn't look particularly powerful performing the crane attacks and her legwork is especially weak (compare with her great skirt kicks in *The Young Master*). Moreover, about 50% of her fight time revolves around swordplay, which is also a disappointment. For women performing the crane, you're better off with *The Crane Fighters*; for great Lily Li fighting, I suggest you check out *Daggers 8*.
- Praying Mantis - Barry Chan - Chan fares a lot better, as his mantis attacks are not only faster and more powerful, but Chan himself seems a lot more prepared for more complex choreography routines--you'll notice that Lily Li's fights are a bit more simplistic. He throws a few powerful kicks as well. Barry Chan also showed up as a mantis fighter in *Mantis Combat*, where he squared off with Chen Sing.
- Eagle Claw - Sze-Ma Lung - Sze played the villain "Shaking Eagle" in *18 Fatal Strikes* and I'm guessing it was a specialty of his. The Eagle Claw style -- Ying Jao Pai -- is a Northern style with brutal ripping attacks, kicks, and acrobatics. The three-fingered eagle style we often see in films is a Southern variation. What Sze-Ma Lung performs here is...well...I'm not really sure. It certainly doesn't look like any Eagle I've ever seen. His claw is five-fingered, so it might be the Northern style, but he doesn't do much tearing and ripping, or kicking for that matter. But like Barry Chan, Sze-Ma Lung is more powerful and convincing than Lily Li was in the film.

**One-Legged Fiend (Taiwan, 1968: Chang Fang-Hsia)** - 5 bandits are sworn brothers and kill and rob poor people. One of them decide to get rid of these bad habits and to turn a new leaf and live a good life, but the same day he leaves his friends, the officers kill all of them and there is only one survivor, who is sentenced to be exiled and to have a leg cut. While he is on his way to the exile, the soldiers decide to rest for a while and he escapes while he is in the cart and falls in the cliff.

Years later, he finds his sworn brother who he believes to be the one who betrayed all the bandits ; this one is married and has a son (Wai Wang )and while this one has gone hunting, he kills his parents. The murder has been witnessed by a doctor who carries puppets and he leaves a puppet with a wooden leg near the two dead. When he returns and discovers the murders, Wai Wang decides to get revenge and he leaves.

The killer (Ma Kei) is now a bandit once again and together with his daughter and this one's lover, he attacks a security escort lead by a brother and a sister and they are saved only because Wai Wang interferes to help them. Later, Ma Kei defeats the brother's and sister's father and this one has to give him all the goods Ma Kei wanted to steal when Wai Wang interfered. When he learns that, Wai Wang discovers also that the bandit who attacked his new friends is also the one who killed his parents and, hidden in one of the carts, he fights with Ma Kei and his men.

Unfortunately, the brother, the sister and Wai Wang are hurt and Wai wang falls in the cliff. He is saved by the same doctor who had witnessed his parents' murder and they are followed by Ma Kei's daughter, who discovers that the doctor is actually her real father and that Ma Kei had kidnapped her after raping and killing her mother 15 years ago.

The girl and Wai Wang become friends and, together with the brother and sister of the security bureau, they decide to kill the evil Ma Kei, but his adoptive daughter can't do it because she remembers that he took care of her during 15 years.

Finally, Wai Wang and those from the security bureau can have their revenge. That's a very good movie, with an interesting plot, full of twists and very good fights. Worth watching.

**Opium and the Kung Fu Master (Hong Kong, 1980: Tong Gaai)** - Tieh Chiao San's (Ti Lung) credentials as a the 'bad ass' kung fu master of the title are firmly established in the blistering opening sequence featuring a night-time rooftop battle with two burglars (one of whom is Phillip Kao Fei). This is contrasted a few scenes later when we see Tieh relaxing with a colleague and smoking opium. While Tieh Chiao San may be the hero, he's not without his weaknesses and faces a battle against his addiction to opium.

When the villainous Master Yung (Chen Kwan Tai) opens an opium den it soon starts to have a detrimental effect on the community as the men-folk spend all of their time and money on drugs. While Tieh Chiao San is blind to the problems, his students are not and start a campaign to close the opium den down; a measure which provokes a violent response from Master Yung. As he slips deeper into opium addiction Tieh Chiao San finds himself unable to protect those he cares about.

In the early eighties when heroin addiction was a growing worldwide problem its easy to see how such a film came to be made. The anti-drugs sentiment may be a little obvious (just say 'no' kids) but doesn't get too heavy as there are moments of levity throughout the film and absolutely tons of quality fight scenes. It also makes a changes for a kung fu film to actually have something to say.

Ti Lung gives one of his best performances (if slightly undercranked at times) and the action set pieces are highly complex. Tong Gaai's characteristic use of interesting weaponry features in just about every fight and we get treated to some wonderful exhibitions including staff, spear, sword and tonfa. The midway battle in a warehouse is a particular highlight but the final duel where Ti Lung takes on all three villains single-handedly (Chen Kwan Tai, Phillip Kao and Lee Hoi San) is out of this world.

**Out of Danger (People's Republic of China, 1985: Yang Chi-Yao, Li Hong-Sheng)** - aka **Rescued from Desperation** - Very reminiscent of "Zen Master 6" (same lead actor, I think), and from the same period, the wu shu performers in this one are good and the choreography is okay. Good scenery and classic story (about vengeful separated-at-childhood siblings who train at Wu Tang and Shaolin). Film suffers from lack of focus and no standout character (it's very ensemble; lead guy unfortunately doesn't get enough time). Contains double rarity: women performing pa kua.

**Pai Yu Ching (Taiwan, 1977: Lee Chia)** - A masked man robs a precious band in the Green Dragon clan and looses a pendant which is supposed to belong to Pai Yu Ching (Tien Peng), and then, this one becomes the target of all the clans of the region and his head is wanted.

Then, there are a lot of fights in order to kill Pai Yu Ching and this one tries to discover who robbed the band (which is actually a fake one) and who killed the Chief of the Green Dragon clan. He is helped by the owner of the inn in which he leaves (Xu Feng) and not only he discovers that she is the dead Chief's daughter, but also that the traitors are the two Chief's lieutenants.

That's a very good movie, with an interesting plot full of twists, betrayals and revenges, and even with a lot of fun in the Tien Peng's fights of the beginning of the movie. Tien Peng, Pai Ying and Xu Feng are excellent in this one.

**Paris Killers (French/Hong Kong, 1974: Alain Jobert)** - Credited to Alain Jobert on the international print and Kwok Ting-Hung on Hong Kong Movie Database, reportedly young director Godfrey Ho (before gaining a reputation as the man behind IFD's ninja cut and paste action pictures such as Ninja Terminator) stepped in to co-direct or took over

this French-Hong Kong co-production. Simple tale of two men fleeing Hong Kong with stolen diamonds and now targets to the extent that not even Paris can act as a hiding place, the good thing is that it's only 78 minutes. The hugely bad thing is that clearly the filmmakers have little else to offer except some fairly strong action but mostly a desire to showcase an international land on the big screen. Drenched in several scenic shots of Paris, nudity from almost every female performer, car chases intercut WITH nudity, Paris Killers desperately tries to stretch itself to feature length by padding and not even somewhat brutal gunplay manages to distract in a true fashion. Starring Tam Sing, Leung Siu Wa plus Wu Ma and Dean Shek make short-lived appearances.

**Payment in Blood (Hong Kong, 1973: Kuei Chih-Hung)** - What a great non stop action movie from the Shaw Brothers! The story begins with Yueh Hua, who witnesses Chan Shen killing someone with his car. He recognizes Chan Shen on the photos shown by the policemen and Chan Shen is arrested. And then begins a real hell for Yueh Hua, his wife and their little daughter. They are attacked even in their own house and when it's the judgment day, Yueh Hua's wife and daughter are kidnapped and Yueh Hua is forced to deny that he saw Chan Shen killing the man. When he finds his wife and his daughter, they are almost drowned ; he succeeds in saving his daughter, but unfortunately his wife dies. Then he decides to take revenge and he manages to find who is the big chief behind all the story. He's almost killed at the big chief office, but he succeeds in helping the police to arrest him.

Yueh Hua is great in this movie and he has good fights. The only sad thing is that the movie is only dubbed in German language, but the story is still easy to follow. There's also a great Kong Do in the movie, with good fights too. I give this movie a 10/10.

**Pearl in Command, A (Hong Kong, 1968: William Wen)** - An official is ordered to convey a precious pearl, I suppose to the Court, and he leaves with his escort. They are attacked by Chu Mu and his men and when Chu Mu takes the box, it's empty and he takes the official as a prisoner in order to torture him to force him to tell where the pearl is.

A young lady dressed as a man ( Chen Man Ling ) seeks the officials' help and she chooses four prisoners to help her. The five of them are on their way to save Chen Man Ling's father, who is the official who had to convey the pearl. They are attacked by the bandits and the prisoners discover that she is a woman. Finally, they find Chen Man Ling's father, but he commits suicide in order to give the pearl to his daughter ( he had swallowed it ). After the final fight, all the prisoners have been killed, but Chen Man Ling is saved and she leaves with the pearl.

Once again, a very good Chen Man Ling's movie, with very good fights and, in the role of one of the prisoners, Paul Chang Chung, who has good fights too and helps her until the end, even when she believes that he has betrayed her while he is helping her. Worth watching.

**Peculiar Boxing Tricks and the Master (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung Chi-Chiu) – aka Drunken Master Strikes Back; Boxing Wizard; Ol' Dirty Strikes Back** - The real star of this film is the cockeral that has to withstand being used as a prop during some of the films fight scenes. When not being swung around or used as a weapon the poor bird is thrown into a cock fighting ring against another cockeral. It's rare that you see such disregard for the well being of an animal during a film and I'm a bit surprised the BBFC let this one through.

The cockeral also allows for some (I'm sure it can't be innocently accidental) dialogue that is full of double entendres. At one point in the film its pretty relentless with lines such as 'let go of my cock', 'give me your cock', 'were prepared to give you 4000 dollars for your red cock' and so on....snigger. That at least appealed to my childish sense of humour but the whole animal cruelty thing was a bit much to take.

This is pretty much yer standard 'Drunken Master' cash in with a young scamp learning kung fu from an old sifu so that he can defeat some villains. The old sifu in this case though is not Yuen Siu Tien who really only appears in a cameo role and has only one, heavily doubled, fight scene. Despite that though the film is still relatively enjoyable when the actors aren't torturing birds. The action is a little slow to start with but picks up at the end with a well staged climax. Ting Hwa Chung, with all his acrobatics, makes for a decent Jackie 'stand in'.

**Phantom Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1978: Lee Tso-Nam) - Mantis in the Monkey's Shadow, Kung Fu Phantom, These Hands Destroy** - Ruthless warlord Chang Yi is killing all the Ming patriots in search of an important document using his poisonous palm to inflict maximum damage. Only the Kung Fu Phantom (Wong Tao) can hope to stop his reign of merciless terror.

At this point, I have seen a few Lee Tso Nam directed movies now, and this one lacks the complexity and plot twisting story lines that most of his other movies feature. Not to say this was a bad film, but just not quite fulfilling as his others.

To me the biggest draw to this movie was the fact that it starred Wong Tao and was directed by Lee Tso Nam. I have to say, both of these facts did not live up to the expectations I had going in to this film. The highlights of this movie came from the main villain played by Chang Yi. Mainly due to his high pitched, nasal speaking dubbed voice which definitely provided more than a few laughs and his "I know I'm better than everybody" mentality. The other highlight came from the cameo appearance of Tommy Lee, whose character kung fu style of choice was the Mantis Fist and the person that played his brother in the movie, his style was the Monkey Fist, and whom also went by the name Drunken Monkey. The actor playing Drunken Monkey actually looked the part, there was a very "Planet of the Apes" look to him. The fighting these two did when they combined their styles, was the most entertaining fight sequence of the movie. From what little action we get to see from these two characters, it really leaves you wanting more. The overall story was about the villain sent out on a mission to retrieve a document with a list of names, he was giving a month to do it. While he was on his quest, he managed to kill off Wong Tao's character quite easily, several times. LOL. That's all I will say, I will try not to give away too much, which I'm sure some of you may think I already have.

Another thing I would like to speak of, regards the opening song played in this movie, I didn't think it was ever going to stop. The music starts as the credits do, but once the credits have stopped, the music is still going. We someone walk up to someone else, and you think they will speak so the music will stop right before, but no, they do not speak and the music is still going. THEN when two characters finally have a brief exchange of words, it sounds as if the music is fading out, but no, it just was lowered so we can hear the few seconds of dialogue, and then the music's volume is increased again and continues to play. Not only does the music play far too long, it also did not fit the look and feel of the movie. Even though I turned off my DVD player when the movie was done, I swear I could still hear the song playing.

The comedy featured in this movie was lighthearted, or due to some of the characters english dubbed voices and or dialogue could be considered "goofy". There were a few characters that were put in to make you laugh, it worked on me a few times, while other times not quite. A more serious movie with a few instances of humor.

The action in this movie for the most part was above average, but didn't draw me in as much. The first fight scene in this movie where Wong Tao was involved was very "jumpy", I think mainly due to frame editing. As I mentioned above, the most entertaining fight came at the hands of Tommy Lee and his "drunken monkey" brother. Hand to hand as well as some legwork is what most of the action is based on. Swords are present, but hardly used.

Standout performance in this movie, has to be Chang Yi, whom played one of the most comical while at the same time vicious villains that I've seen in a while. Comical partly due to the wacky over the top voice used to dub his character, and also because of his body language when he is talking. His characters ultimate weapon of death was actually not a weapon at all, but his hands. His style referred to as the "palm of death", was very similar to the glowing red hands as seen in the classic Shaw Bros movie King Boxer (Five Fingers of Death) and Magnificent Butcher. The only difference being that Chang Yi's hands didn't glow at all, instead smoke would come from them as if they were on fire, and only one strike to his opponent is needed for the kill.

This movie is a definite buy if found at a good price, but I would have to recommend a rental for the action junkies, as this movie is not really packed with wall to wall fights.

**Phantom Lute, The (Taiwan, 1975: Larry Tu)** - A young scholar lives in an inn and has Chia Ling and her father as neighbours. Chia Ling is a singer with a lute who sings in the inn in order to earn money to cure her father who is ill. After hearing her singing in the inn, General Chao (Tien Feng) asks her to come to his house to sing for him. As her father cannot go with her, she goes there alone by a stormy night. Then, the general tries to rape her and as she refuses to do what he wants, he kills her and, with the help of one of his men (Wei Ping Ao), he burns the body.



The scholar and the father seek justice and accuse the general, but the judge doesn't want to believe them though the scholar has found Chia Ling's burnt lute (the judge has been bribed by Tien Feng) and they are chased from the inn. In a temple where they found shelter, the father is about to die and Chia Ling appears and he dies happy. Then, she tells the scholar that she is a ghost and she asks him to help her to get justice and revenge against Tien Feng. He agrees to help her and decides to go to the capital in order to ask Judge Pao to reopen the case. Chia Ling's ghost is hidden in the lute and she appears only at night.

Tien Feng hires a taoist priest to get rid of the ghost and he sends his men to kill the scholar. They almost succeed, but the judge of the ghosts saves Chia Ling and finally the scholar can speak to Judge Pao and Chia Ling can appear and explain all what happened to him. That's a very good ghost movie, worth watching.

**Pier, The (Hong Kong, 1983: Philip Ko Fei, Terry Tong)** - Awful, inept, directionless film about a rivalry between two crime bosses (played by Philip Ko Fei and Tien Feng) who specialize in prostitution and human trafficking. Norman Tsui Siu-Keung plays a adulterous lout who Works for the newspaper that's a front for Tien Feng's activities, who comes into possession of a recording of a conversation between Tien Feng and a Thai "supplier". Leung Kar-Yan (Sporting only a mustache) plays a bumbling cop who's trying to solve the case, or something. Johnny Wang Lung-Wei shows up as a mob enforcer. The movie just goes nowhere for most of its 75-minute running time. It's more than 40 minutes into the film before there are any meaningful fights. Norman (or his double) is quick and acrobatic, and Leung Kar-Yan does some faux-Muay Thai in the finale against Philip Ko. The rest is chaotic Triad machete-wielding and hacking. The film is set in the 20s, probably in order to cash in on *Project A's* success, especially if you consider that one of the set pieces features a bicycle chase.

**Pirate, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Chang Cheh, Wu Ma, Pao Hsueh-Li)** - Second watching after 10 years. I must confess that I had totally forgotten a lot of scenes from this movie, I only remembered the ending fight with David Chiang and the admiration the general had for the pirate due to his kind heart. I had also forgotten the actress Yu feng who has a good fight at the beach. I know that Tien Ching played in swordplays for the Cathay company (I remember to have seen him fighting in Jade dragon among others), but I don't remember to have seen him fighting in any Shaw Brothers' movies he was in. Here, he plays the villain (as usual, I should say), but he has a very good fighting sequence that I had totally forgotten too and it's something to see him fighting when one is used to see him playing traitors, cowards, or comedic roles. Once again, a superb movie, with great David Chiang and Ti Lung, and excellent fights !!

**Point The Finger Of Death (Taiwan, 1977: Chin Sheng-En) – aka One Arm Chivalry Fights Against One Arm Chivalry** - This may be another Jimmy Wang Yu one-armed movie but it lacks the fury and grit of his older films (especially when directing himself). Simple but also a bit too complicated for its own good, it's a Ming vs Ching story with another one-armed swordsman (Lau Kar-Wing) stirring up trouble and making Wang Yu's brothers turn against him. Solid swordplay and an intense finale between Wang Yu and Lung Fei involving water and flour makes this tolerable but not essential viewing early in your fandom of anyone involved here.

**Police Force (Hong Kong, 1973: Chang Cheh)** - Chang Cheh shows he was just as competent directing modern day drama as he was with period action movies.

When a young karate champion is murdered his best friend joins the police force vowing revenge after police efforts fail to bring the culprits to justice. Wang Chun, in the lead role, faces a moral dilemma when he eventually finds those responsible; whether to honor his promise to his dead friend's fiancé, and kill the murderer, or follow his newfound loyalties to the police service and allow justice to take its course. It's interesting to see Chang Cheh tackle the subject of revenge from a different angle; the main characters are forced to consider the consequences of their actions.

There are some martial arts, with that early seventies unstylised fight choreography, but also a large dose of gunplay and a typically bloody climax.

**Postman Strikes Back (Hong Kong, 1982: Ronnie Yu)** - This felt like one of the many HK movies that could have been great but didn't quite reach that mark. I see it was shot entirely in Korea, and likely during the dead of Winter judging by the snow in many scenes. This made for some beautiful and nice shots, but I must wonder if it contributed to some of the film's flaws. The main (and really only) issue with the movie is many possible sub-plots are introduced and never touched again. So while it could have been a very dark martial arts drama, it just becomes another tale of brotherhood and revenge more or less. It's still an extremely dark film and that adds to the movie, but it lacks an emotional punch it could have had due to the dropped subplots. Thus the story basically just becomes a rag tag group on a job to deliver unknown goods from a mysterious man, and they grow a bond that's hard to believe due to the run time.

Luckily for me the characters' interaction and the beautiful location shots made the movie easy to watch between the action for me. It was cool to see a young Chow Yun Fat, not to mention doing some decent kung fu! His best scene is one where he gets to fight Kwan Il-Soo and Jaguar Wong himself, doing a fun little Voltron fighting style. Beardsley is great in the action throughout, and Fan Mei Sheng has a couple awesome "frenzy" scenes, which seem to be something he got to do often. Eddy Ko is decent, and Yuen Yat Choh is sadly underused, but puts on a solid acting performance; as does the rest of the cast for the most part. The action is shot in a style that falls somewhere between the modern and old school, which is interesting given the time it was made.

Good flick, but can't help but think how good it could be with some more run time. Nice cinematography, fun characters, good action and a very dark ending brought down by an overly simple plot that could've been. If they were gonna short the plot so much, they should have just had more fights! Come on, I want to see Beardsley fight Jack Lam, haha!

**Pretended Rebel (Taiwan, 1979: Joe Law)** - aka **Wolf-Boxer; Ninja Wolves** - The movie starts with exposition from a narrator setting up the historical context of the fall of the last Chinese dynasty and the Japanese. Chang Yi plays the corrupt eunuch who misappropriates tribute from the Japanese meant for the emperor. Yueh Hua and Chan Muk-Chuen play Japanese martial arts experts. The original title "A Pretended Rebel" is a bit of a spoiler as to what is really going on.

The alternate titles with "wolf" or "ninja" are obvious bait for the old VHS rental business that kept so many of these old martial arts movies from vanishing into film dust particles. My copy is a digital file from an Ocean Shores VHS. It is English dubbed. Some of these 1970s movies were actually made unwatchable by horrible voice actors. This movie used the "A team" of voice actors though I don't know their names I recognize their voices.

The movie runs long at over one hour and fifty one minutes and could easily have been trimmed down to ninety minutes just by cutting out a lot of walking across the frame. The pacing of the action also suffers and worse the action is just not good enough for 1979 standards. The characters are also unlikeable with too much focus on the bad deeds. Overall I rate it below average and only suitable for hard core completists.

**Princess Fragrance (People's Republic of China, 1987: Ann Hui)** - Ann Hui's direct follow up to *The Romance Of Book & Sword*, the adaptation of famed Wuxia novel author Louis Cha's first novel *The Book & The Sword*, probably would survive without the first movie as a backbone but more rewards come as elements are expanded upon that were only given a small spotlight the first time around. While Hui explored families bound by blood but not thoroughly loyalties in regards to Chen Jialo and Emperor Qiao Long's relationship, she gives us a first half here that merely seems interested in the visual splendor and the battle at hand.

That isn't necessarily a bad thing as Hui continues to bring a muted, natural handling to her direction while still utilizing the vast Chinese landscapes to great effect. Martial arts is also kept to a minimum and the army battles are suitably non-stylized. There's no shame going in this direction but you do wonder what happened to the small aspects within the large scale happenings that made *The Romance Of Book & Sword* so compelling.

Hui does a quick 180 by the time you start cd 2 of your vcd as both an outspoken and unspoken romantic triangle is allowed to dominate as well as the low-key skills of director Hui. Elements aren't fresh as such but nonetheless affecting. Never one to forget what the main story is, the films in the end become compelling glimpses into Louis Cha's work in condensed form. It's a rare thing to allow the actual trademark of an acclaimed director to matter in an obviously epic story but that freedom is why Hui definitely comes out on top.

**Prodigal Boxer, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Choi Yeung Ming)** - The martial arts action by Lau Kar Wing (who also appears) and Wong Pau Gei doesn't set the screen on fire but director Choi Yeung Ming possesses some unusually strong storytelling abilities and a genuine cinematic sense. The featuring of Chinese folk hero Fong Sai Yuk (Meng Fei - Five Shaolin Masters) will no doubt make viewers comfortable with characteristics early as we're given the trademark ignorant and rash behaviour to the young hero. Unlike the Jet Li and the Hsiao Hao interpretations, things leans more towards subdued here and the revenge drama at times comes with fine dramatic instincts for the genre. Some mundane events go on forever though, showing a definite inexperience in director Choi but the fact that the actual drama outdoes to the action is an unusual final verdict on an independent martial arts effort. Also with Maggie Lee, Yusuaki Kurata and Wong Ching. Fung Hark On, Yam Sai Koon and Yuen Cheung Yan can also be spotted.

**Prodigal Son, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Sammo Hung)** - Sammo Hung Kam-Bo's first film on Wing Chun and one of its important experts Leung Jan was the exquisite treatise named Warriors Two (1978). His second movie, The Prodigal Son (1981), would be a much more box-office successful and less didactic prequel to that film and would be his biggest hit until his next movie Carry on Pickpocket (1982). It should be noted that Sammo's importance to the action and martial art genre cannot be overstated and his 1980s directed efforts are still some of the supreme examples of Hong Kong entertainment. This movie is one of his best and among several of the Golden Harvest produced action classics that I have seen many, many times.

In Warriors Two, the important Wing Chun practitioner Leung Jan was an elder gentleman brilliantly played by Leung Kar-Yan. He is now portrayed by Yuen Biao (Knockabout, Project A) as a protected somewhat spoilt kid whose hubris is directly related to the fact that he has won all his fights, unbeknownst to him though they were thrown. He keeps on his fraudulent winning ways until he tries to fight the brilliant and effeminate Peking opera female impersonator star Leung Yee-Tai (Lam Ching Ying: Mr. Vampire (1985), Painted Faces (1988)) who stars as Lotus Poon, is a master in Wing Chun and unwilling to take a bribe. This defeat along with the realization that all his wins were faked (and the help of another defeat by two "mole" people) leads him to seek a sifu in Leung Yee-Tai. He refuses and Leung Jan has his dad buy the opera so he can take a job there and hopefully get Yee-Tai to acquiesce.

Meanwhile, Ngai Fei (played by the composer Frankie Chan Fan-Kei in his second acting performance) the son of royalty sees Yee-Tai fight and feels he must challenge him to a battle. This is analogous to the earlier story of Leung Jan; both are prodigal sons, except that Ngai Fei can actually fight. This leads to an awesome fight on a junk between Ngai and Yee-Tai that is interrupted by Yee-Tai's asthma attack. Ngai being honorable will not take advantage of his sick opponent. However, his two of his cronies employed by Ngai's father are not so exemplary. They see Yee-Tai as a threat and later try to off him in an overly violent attack by hired ninja-like assassins. This is one of the few scenes in the film where compared to the tone of the film was a bit excessive (though still quite cool).

To escape from these assassins and to allow Yee-Tai to heal, they go to Yee-Tai's Wing Chun brother Wong Wah Bo's (director Sammo Hung) house where he is not teaching his overweight daughter Twiggy (Ho Wai-Han) how to fight he is doing calligraphy (one of the funniest and impossible to describe scenes; also shows his interest in this art form analogous to the calligraphy fighting scene in The Magnificent Butcher (1979)). He is a master of the long distance form (masculine) of Wing Chun while his comrade Yee-Tai knows only close fighting. Leung Jan must get both of these masters to teach him so he can become a stalwart in martial arts and take part in the ubiquitous training scenes.

As normal in biographic cinema, Sammo Hung takes some dramatic license in its portrayal of these real-life characters (which he also did in Warriors Two). Leung Yee-Tai and Wong Wah Bo did in fact teach Leung Jan. Leung Yee Tai was in fact in an opera troupe "Red Junk" (also known as the King Fa Wui Goon troupe) and was known for his "Six-and-a-half point Long Pole" technique which was not addressed in this film. Leung Yee-Tai was known for playing a female lead (female players were illegal at this time) which his portrayer Lam Ching Ying also did under the tutelage of sifu Fan Fok-Fa. This helps in his authentic display and wonderful performance. Possibly his best, though he will always be known for being the thick eye-browed priest in Mr. Vampire and he has mentioned his favorite is in Painted Faces. While the history of Wing Chun is somewhat sketchy and anecdotal, the time period for this movie takes place around the 1850s.

Hong Kong action film expert Bey Logan has named this as his favorite martial art film and it is hard to disagree. While there are a few moments of brutality that seem out-of-place and many of the fights make you wish they were longer, it is a thoroughly satisfying film. Two of the fights: with Lam Ching Ying fighting Frankie Chan and Yuen Biao fighting Frankie Chan are worth watching several times. The finale is quite brutal and fits the Wing Chun mantra of

"If an opponent is hurt, go for his wounds" quite well. The action is brilliant, fast paced and fits the theme of the movie quite well with gorgeous displays of Wing Chun and other styles. The plot actually helps the film instead of being inconsequential or a distraction. It is also an exquisite looking film with cinematographer Ricky Lau Koon-Wai (director of Mr. Vampire and many more kyonshi films) doing a superb job. There are also the descriptive backstage Peking opera scenes and the Cantonese comedy which works almost seamless with the action helps make this movie a most enjoyable experience. In fact it is one of my favorite martial art movies (cannot choose one though) and one I would recommend to convert others on to this genre.

**Professional Killer, The (Taiwan, 1971: Hsin Chi) - Assassin** - In order to get some money, Wang Yu sells his sword to Lui Ming and this one is hired by a family to be his bodyguard. They are attacked and Wang Yu, who passes by, witnesses the attack and saves Lui Ming's life. This one returns the sword and they become friends. Then, Lui Ming proposes a job to Wang Yu : being a professional killer. For the money, Wang Yu accepts, but after each murder, he is tormented.

Finally, Lui Ming leads him to his boss (Miao Tien), who belongs to the followers of the Yuan dynasty and wants him to kill his enemies (the royal power). During a battle in which he doesn't take any part, Wang Yu discovers that one of the murdered man is his brother, who was on his way to deliver an important letter to the partisans of the Queen.

Wang Yu brings the letter to the family who was supposed to receive it, but the brothers have been killed and the sister has been raped and is saved by Wang Yu. Finally, this one falls in love with the girl and she asks him to stop killing for Miao Tian. He agrees with her, but his boss forces him to kill someone else, but he doesn't kill him and the target is killed by someone else, but everyone believes that it's him who killed him and his friends want to get revenge.

Finally, Miao Tian kidnaps the girl in order to force Wang Yu to obey his orders, but Wang Yu defeats him and promises to the dead girl to deliver the letter to the royal forces. A very good movie, with a lot of twists and good fights, and an unusual Wang Yu who kills because he is forced to do it but has bad conscience for doing it. Worth watching.

**Protectors, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Wu Ma)** - Although Celestial's remastering technique of cutting frames means certain movies were a few minutes shorter, Wu Ma's The Protectors originally must've been very short and therefore an exercise in being short and to the point. Two security guards, Ling (Lo Lieh) and Guan (Cheung Poi-Saan) become enemies when the latter sees the opportunity to make more money if collaborating Jin (Wang Hsish) to steal the next escort containing silver. Almost made with Shaw Brothers having engaged the automatic gear, it's actually very cool to get a quick fix because it's there. Fine costumes, decent action with blood and sneaky weapons and a bit unfortunate, too many twists for 62 minutes.

**Proud Horse in Flying Sand, The (Taiwan, 1977: Siu Muk) - Duel in the Desert** - For a martial arts film this has an unusually complicated plot full of strange twists and stranger characters. In fact, I'm still not entirely clear what the story was about and who is who. Still, it was enjoyable and different and it seemed to possibly be influenced by The Fate of Lee Khan. (Though I am not actually sure which film came first as I don't know the year of this one. If anyone knows I would appreciate them sending me the information)

As in Lee Khan, much of the film takes place in an inn and nothing is as it appears. The story opens in a small town in China at some point in the far past and there is a big horse race occurring in a few days. The town is full of strangers and many of them are staying at the inn run by Angela Mao's father. Under the pretense of being there for the horse race a number of characters stop by but all of them have some other scheme going on and no one is who they appear to be. I mean no one.

During the film, these characters keep shifting their allegiance from one person to another and trying to make under the table deals with one another. At the end all the dirty tricks and dirty laundry float to the surface. There is fighting interspersed within all this double-dealing, but it isn't until the end when a good fight comes along.

The fight scenes are far from great – lots of sound effects – with clearly very little contact being made. Angela is only in a few short scenes though in the last fight she does some nice flips, cartwheels and a snake like attack. One of her opponents is her constant film nemesis – Pai Ying. She looks great though, but watch her closely !

**Proud Twins, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Chor Yuen)** - This tale of hidden treasure, a twin trained to kill his brother and a young wushu warrior in the Valley of Villains. Alexander Fu Sheng is a kung fu kid out to discover the truth about his parents' death.

This was a sleeper to me. I did not think it would be that good. This is compared to Heroes Shed No Tears. This movie is much better than that movie. Fu Sheng gives a better performance here. He is very funny, but not too silly like he was in Cat vs. Rat. Where he somewhat ham boned his performance. He makes the movie. He is also very smart to outsmart these henchman who were trying to kill him. He made them eat the poisoned food. In this movie is Wang Jung, Candy Wen Hsueh Erh, Liu Wei Ling (a really sexy lady!), Chan Shen, Ching Miao, Liu Kim Ming, Lin Hui Huang, Ku Kuan Chung, Yang Ching Ching, Tang Ching, Kitty Meng Chui and Wang Ching Ho. This was a sleeper, funny movie!

This has comedy. Fu Sheng showing his butt while he was urinating was funny. When he ran away from a tiger was funny. A lot of antics in this movie was funny.

The action is fast paced and good, nothing amazing, but good.

Alexander Fu Sheng was the whole movie. He was funny and gave a good performance. He is my standout performer.

**Purple Darts (Hong Kong, 1969: Pan Lei)** - Wang Ling plays a swordswoman carrying out revenge on her parent's death, with her calling card being the titular purple darts. Having to team up with the son of one of her victims in order to take down one of the most invincible forces of the martial world, Purple Darts is a limp, age old story from Shaw Brothers. Wang Ling has sufficient fury in her eyes but her participation in the action leads to some very choppy and stagey swordfights. That the aftermaths are often very gory is a plus but there's no supersharp team working anywhere here.

**Pursuit (Hong Kong, 1972: Cheng Kang)** - Lin Chung, the instructor for the Imperial troops meets up with an old friend of his Lu Zhi Shen who is now a monk. While they drink, the son of the Commander of the Sung forces, Gao Chui tries to rape Lin Chung's wife while a number of his colleagues wreak havoc. Lin stops them and narrowly avoids a major situation. For this embarrassment, Gao and Lu Chien, a supposed friend of Lin's conspire with Commander Gao to have Lin executed. After much torture, Lin is to be escorted to another province but orders are given to kill him before he reaches his destination. Lin's one true friend, Lu Zhi Shen, the wily monk, is never far behind and saves him. Meanwhile, Gao Chui, still desiring Lin's wife, learns of her whereabouts. After numerous plots and attempts on his life and a final, violent altercation involving his wife and family, Lin Chung forgoes his life of an honorable and law abiding soldier taking bloody revenge on his enemies and inevitably taking his place among the Liang Shan Outlaws.

Brilliant and highly dramatic Wu Xia sword picture from one of the unsung HK cinema masters, Cheng Kang. Every scene reeks of professionalism with numerous scenes packing a theatrical wallop with director Cheng Kang often times building the suspense and others hitting you in the face with their abruptness. There are many striking sequences here both exquisite in their beauty and deplorable in their violence. As per most Shaw Brothers movies the villains here are the most wicked scum and nearly all of them have high military positions which makes it all the more disturbing.

Yue Hua delivers an awesome performance and probably my favorite outside of his arrogant poet freedom fighter in Chang Cheh's oft maligned Republic Era martial drama IRON BODYGUARD (1973). In PURSUIT (1972), the villains really put him through hell. Over and over, I kept feeling sorry for his character wondering when he'd get an upper hand. Towards the end he even looks up to the heavens and asks what has he done to deserve so much torment.

The first torture scene is extremely brutal where the soldiers pound him repeatedly in the chest with the ends of large poles.

On his long trip to Cang Zhou, he is mercilessly tortured by his two escorts, Dong Chao and Xu Ba. They whip him and place his feet in scalding water among other things. At one point they plan to kill him inside the Wild Boar Forest proclaiming that "We're only following orders". Knowing what is to occur, director Cheng builds this scene nicely as Lin is flogged and shoved around inside the thick underbrush of the forest accompanied by music by Akira Ifukube lifted from DAIMAJIN (1966). The wild monk arrives and saves his friend lending an opportunity for the fight choreographers to shine. Lu breaks Lin free of the Cangue but Lin still retains that "This is the law". A new plan is hatched to do away with Lin that will either ensure his death or execution one way or the other.

And even after numerous bouts of suffering and cruelty at the hands of his attendants, he can't be brought to despise them until late in the movie when he finally realizes there is nothing he can do to clear his name but fight back. Lu Zhi Shen understood this and at one point near the end, he says "Brother, you didn't listen to me before...now your family is ruined." Once Lin has abandoned his noble ways, he becomes a violently determined warrior whose only option is to kill those who've betrayed and framed him and because all those involved are military officials, he will have to become an outlaw to accomplish this. This element is handled well by Cheng Kang and he wrings every bit of righteous ideology from Lin Chung before he is transformed into an indomitable force seeking retribution and final justice. The next to last scene in which Lin confronts his former Commander by presenting him with his sons head is expertly handled with all of the soldiers Lin trained coming to the aid of the Commander only to have them disobey him and side with Lin. A wonderfully cheerful moment which leads to the last scene in which Lin is off to join the Honorable 108 Liang Shan Mountain Bandits, the Outlaws of the Marsh.

Fan Mei-sheng excels as the crazy but righteous monk, Lu Zhi Shen. He has a strong constitution for piety and integrity. The relationship between Lin and Lu builds the foundation for the entire film; That no matter the circumstance, good can overcome evil. The film is divided amongst those two factions; the corrupt and evil government, which, unlike mere ruffians or murdering swordsmen, great power is involved making it a bit more difficult for justice to be served. The other faction is the good, represented by both Lin Chung and Lu Zhi Shen. It's never made quite clear exactly why Commander Gao and his men want Lin dead aside from the fact that Gao and the others are corrupt, essentially ruthless thugs occupying political posts allowing them to run rampant and do what they want. Lin represents truth, nobility and honor which is a threat to Gao and his unscrupulous horde. Again, Cheng Kang balances both of these perfectly.

Both Yue Hua and Fan Mei-sheng would feature in Chang Cheh's WATER MARGIN (1972) and ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS (1973) both installments in the famous Outlaws of the Marsh literary works. This film is a worthy companion piece to those two movies. However, this film does not exemplify the action but character development which dominates the bulk of the movie lending a powerful and dramatic punch to the action when it arrives. The villains are conniving and vicious in their deeds of uncompromising cruelty. Yang Chi-ching, who plays the Commander here also played villains in Chang Cheh's FLYING DAGGER (1968) and Ho Meng Hua's AMBUSH (1972). The star of AMBUSH (1972), Chiao Hsiung, plays one of the devious escorts who leads Lin Chung on his way to an almost certain death. Chiao was apparently being groomed for stardom but it seems he never caught on with audiences. I like him but his burly appearance and somewhat villainous face probably kept him from future starring roles. He did headline the aforementioned AMBUSH (1972) and THE GOLDEN LION (1975) among some other credits.

A very entertaining and highly recommended swordplay movie which has some dynamite sets such as the forest sequence and the snowbound finale. The Akira Ifukube music lifted from DAIMAJIN (1966) and possibly another of his Japanese composed films suits the film's gloomy atmosphere. If you want to see lots and lots of fights, you should steer clear of this one and go for something like AMBUSH (1972) instead but if you want a very dramatic and theatrical experience laced with some strong fights, then this is a worthy film for your collection.

**Queen Boxer (Hong Kong, 1972: Florence Yu) – aka The Avenger** - The movie begins with a man who has a rendezvous with a big boss in Shanghai. He is trapped and murdered by the boss's fighters who achieve him with axes. Everybody has recognized that the murdered man is Ma Yong Zhen. Later, the big boss learns that Ma Su Chen (Ma Yong Zhen's sister), who is a fierce fighter, is coming to Shanghai with all her family in order to take revenge for her brother and he sends his men in order to spot the Ma family and kill them as soon as they leave the train station.

Then, a family arrives in Shanghai, and they are all murdered (if I remember well, I watched it a while ago), but they aren't the Ma family. Actually, the murdered family is a food seller's family, played by Yang Kwan. He meets Ma Su

Chen and they fight together against the boss' men, but they don't want to share the same vengeance, until they finally realize that they'll be stronger if they unite against the murderers.

However, Yang Kwan doesn't listen to Ma Su Chen's advices and, though he is hurt and she has gone to search some medicine in order to cure him, he goes to the boss' inn once again and he is murdered too. Then, Ma Su Chen becomes a real fury and an even more fierce fighter than her reputation and she destroys all the boss' gang and finally kills him the same way he killed his brother and take his eyes out (he had burnt her brother's eyes). Once again, it's really a superb non stop movie and Chia Ling is GREEAAT !!

**Queen Of Fist (Taiwan, 1973: Kim Lung) aka Kung fu Mama** - Also known as Kung Fu Mama, in reality its concept is more akin to a kung fu GRANDMA and that makes us endure this otherwise reeking piece of... generics. Getting in trouble with local gangsters, the titular character (played by the awesome Tse Gam-Guk) is the head of a kung fu family and herself specializes in internal strength. Yep, it gets a pay off but when we're looking through the less than glass state of the widescreen print at hand here, it's easy to make the determination that when the bashing is so non-distinctive and not dangerous in the least, we've got a problematic genre entry on our hands. Not even recurring Taiwan baddie Lung Fei manages to make an imprint before the finale but again, Tse Gam-Guk does when she lets loose. Showcasing the needed intensity and grit in her mammoth battle with Lung Fei, finally Queen Of Fist nails the coolness of the concept, in spades.

**Queen's Ransom, A (Hong Kong, 1975: Ting Shan-Hsi)** - George Lazenby leads a band of criminals (including Jimmy Wang Yu and Bolo Yeung) to Hong Kong in order to assassinate Queen Elizabeth II on a scheduled visit to the region. The police find out after one of the assassins drunkenly makes cryptic remarks to a bar hostess/prostitute at her house. Meanwhile, a deposed Burmese (or Cambodian, depending on the version you're watching) princess (kung fu queen Angela Mao) is hanging out in the sticks of a Hong Kong while her people, with the help of the local Triads, are smuggling gold and arms out of her country and into HK, presumably for a counter-Coup of sorts. The two story threads eventually meet up, first coincidentally and then in a way I personally didn't see coming. There isn't a whole lot of action here, and when there is, it's not very satisfying. While Lazenby gave a good physical performance in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, watching him beat the snot out of Angela Mao is not my idea of a good time at the movies. In the end, the film is a colossal waste of a time of the talents involved.

**Rage of the Wind (Hong Kong, 1973: Ng See-Yuen) - aka Fists of Death; Ninja Warlord** - A master boxer who has forsaken the ring due to the accidental killing of his best friend. He returns home with his Eurasian wife. When he returns home he finds out the atrocities his people have been subjected to by the Japanese.

This movie was a little above average. It was above average because of Chen Sing and Yasuaki Kurata. Yasuaki Kurata who has impressed me playing villains. He does a good job in this movie. Kurata is a great kicker. Chen Sing does a good job in this movie too.

The action was okay. So- so in some spots and good in others. There was some blood coming from the mouths of some people. Chen Sing gives the standout performance for coming back.

**Raging Master's Tiger Crane (South Korea, 1982: Cho Yu-Hyeong) - aka Raging Master of Tiger Crane; Raging Tiger** - Choi Yu-hyeong, who helmed a handful of kung-fu movies in the late 70's and early 80's (including *Enter the Game of Death* and *Shaolin Drunk Fighter*), directed this 1982 production starring Benny Tsui and Hwang Jang Lee. While Korean kung-fu movies normally get a bad rep, usually due to Godfrey Ho slicing and dicing them rather than any fault of the original production, there are 2 names that tend to make me extremely weary - one is Elton Chong, and the other is Benny Tsui. While *Raging Master's Tiger Crane* doesn't feature Chong, it does have Tsui in the lead role. Both actors' movies normally suffer from brain hemorrhage inducing comedy, ear bleedingly awful soundtracks, and debatably entertaining kung-fu scenes.

'Raging Master's Tiger Crane' definitely features the first two elements, however it does make up for it with some impressive fight action that opens and closes proceedings. Getting through the rest of it is a challenge few may be up to taking on, depending on your patience. The plot is some complete nonsense about Tsui having a missing brother, a valuable necklace, and a girl named Betty. Lots of gurning and slapstick ensue, however surprisingly none

of it involves Hwang, who looks like he's acting in an entirely different movie, remaining poker faced throughout. Speaking of entirely different movies, one of his fight scenes actually is from a different production, in a bizarre scene which has a monk raining coins down on Hwang while he's in the middle of training, before fighting him and being abruptly killed. The fact that Hwang's hairstyle and clothes don't match at all with the rest of the movie seems to be a minor issue.

Tsui does hardly anything in terms of fighting for almost the entire run time, but then he really gets to unleash at the end, in an extended finale which see's him taking on a small army of opponents, before the final confrontation with Hwang. As annoying as he's been for the whole movie up until this part, the guy has some nice kicking skills, and watching the finale made me wish he'd unleashed much sooner. The fight with Hwang is a real know down drag out affair, with them going at it in a variety of different environments. At one point Hwang even runs up a tree, which must have been considered so cool that a few seconds later he does it again, only it's exactly the same shot, followed by exactly the same kick! I've heard about recycling footage, but recycling it a few seconds after the original footage has been shown!?

All in all 'Raging Master's Tiger Crane' is a largely insufferable affair, book-ended by some nice fight action which displays plenty of impressive kicking.

**Raiders of the Shaolin Temple (Taiwan, 1984: Fong Ho) – aka Raiders of Wu Tang** - When the Shaolin monks suspect that they may soon be attacked by an evil warlord, their best fighter, Wisdom (Chan Siu Pang), sets off to try to get help from neighbouring clans. However the evil warlord has already used deception to turn the clans against Shaolin and Wisdom receives a less than warm reception wherever he goes.

Meanwhile, in a completely separate sub-plot, a young ranch hand (Sonny Yue) is taught kung fu by a couple of crippled monks who apparently got their wounds after training in the banned chamber of the 24 bronze horses within Shaolin Temple. This is a training room so dangerous that all are forbidden to enter however the two crippled monks see potential in the ranch hand and decide to train him to complete what they were unable to finish.

The evil warlord goes on the offensive against the clans, wiping them out one by one and eventually arrives at Shaolin slaughtering everyone. It is then left to Sonny Yue to use his new found skill to defeat the warlord and his henchmen.

Despite the title I don't think that this has anything to do with Wu-tang as the protagonists strangely use cymbals as weapons rather than swords. It's more likely that the film has been re-titled in an attempt to make it more eye catching.

Whatever the reason this is a film definitely worth watching as it contains some very imaginative fight choreography and Sonny Yue displays some fantastic kicking techniques (when I first saw this in the cinema he earned a round of applause from the audience). Chan Siu Pang gets the largest percentage of the fighting in this movie, which is no bad thing, and is up to his usual standard. Sonny Yue doesn't really get to fight anyone until the film's climax but it's well worth waiting for.

The training scenes, in the bronze horse chamber, are quite unlike anything I've seen before and, while they do require a level of suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience, are certainly original in style. Also the crippled masters deliver some of the most unbelievable techniques and make this worth watching for them alone.

**Raiders of Yunkang Caves (People's Republic of China, 1984: Cheung Ho)** - A sprawling epic that came at around the time of the early Jet Li/"Holy Robe of Shaolin"/authentic China era. Similarly, this one features spectacular authentic location scenery of the strange Yungang grottoes (northwest China), obligatory Shaolin Temple visit and fighting monks, and a typically back-and-forth patriotism storyline. The stars of this film are decorated wu shu champions. Although the main character is somewhat disappointing, his supporting cast is excellent. Warning: much screen time devoted to an chubby 'comedy' sidekick (a 'funny beggar' type) with a crew cut. These scenes are annoying.

**Rattling Whip (Taiwan, 1969: Richard Yeung Kuen)** - Tin Ming plays an undercover marshall who wants to arrest famous bandit Kao Pao Tien and he wants this latter's daughter to help him to find the castle where the bandit lives.



He mistakes a young lady for Kao Pao Tien's daughter and saves her life while she is in an inn where she met her father's friend, who was Kao Pao Tien's man. We discover that Kao Pao Tien was her mother's brother-in-law and that he tried to rape her once he was drunk. He fought with the young lady's father and hurt her mother with a poisoned dart. During the 18 following years, the lady's father trained her to fight in order that she takes revenge for her mother's death. The real story is that actually, the young lady is Kao Pao Tien's daughter and she and her twin sister were separated by the one she believes to be her father the night he fought with his drunken chief and that he trained her with the purpose that she kills her own father. Fortunately, she is helped by the marshal and the truth is discovered before she kills her father. That's a very good movie, with interesting fights. Worth watching.

**Raw Courage (Hong Kong, 1969: Lo Wei)** - Cheng Pei-peï did so many films with director Lo Wei that one has to wonder if he had compromising pictures of her. None of these collaborations are great films, but they do provide some entertainment and a few thrills and we should be grateful to Lo Wei for using her as much as he did. I am just curious as to the working dynamics of this relationship – did he have first rights to her services, did other directors not want to use her, did Shaw mandate that she do nothing but Wuxia films? At the time these were made in the mid to late 1960's the modern Wuxia film was still really in its technical infancy and it wasn't until the next decade before Chor Yuen gave these kinds of films their more graceful seamless Shaw style. By that time though, both Cheng Pei-peï and Lo Wei had left the studio though they were to team up again in a few other films outside of Shaw. It would have been interesting to have seen Cheng Pei-peï in a Chor Yuen production though he seems to have preferred sleek chilly actresses like Lily Ho.

I do think that with all these Lo Wei films being released – not just the Cheng Pei-peï ones but also some of his others – that his career as a film director will be reassessed in a more favorable light. Certainly he was not a visionary or a groundbreaker, but he was not a hack either as many have written. He was more of a studio hired hand to take on whatever was assigned to him, a competent journeyman director with a nice eye for sumptuous design, glistening visuals and beautiful women. Interestingly, these elements were very much missing in the Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan films for which his reputation was so maligned. Perhaps he was not comfortable in the kung-fu genre - and certainly the weakest part of his Shaw films is the often poorly choreographed action scenes – or he just didn't have the budgets and infrastructure that he needed. One would never think the same director was behind both the lavish James Bond type film, "The Golden Buddha" and the bare to the bones Jackie Chan film, "Shaolin Wooden Men". The other thing that Lo Wei has to be credited with was his willingness to use females in action roles – not something that Shaw was doing a lot of in the 1960's. Not only with Cheng Pei-peï but he also made the two Angel films with Lily Ho as a secret agent and after leaving Shaw, he made some terrific films with Polly Shang-kwan. And the women in these films tended to be all business as he kept romance and sexuality very much in the background. Lo Wei the feminist!

This is a fairly high budgeted film with good production values, big sets, hundreds of extras and numerous large-scale action scenes. This is also perhaps the weakness of the film because it lacks a sense of intimacy, character development or variation. This is especially true of the action sequences – they are all very similar with a small band of heroes taking on a large group of bad guys and killing a whole lot of them. The film needed a few change ups thrown in there – some good one on one fights spotlighting the skills of the performers would have been welcome. Still one shouldn't complain about too much action and the myriad of fight scenes builds up to an excellent final fifteen minutes of well-stylized action.

The palace walls of Ming Emperor Jianwen (1398-1402) are being breeched by a hoard of rebels under his uncle Yongle and seeing disaster ahead he gives his infant son over to Hero Shangguan (Lo Wei) for protection and hopefully to regain the throne in the future before he sets his palace on fire and dies in the inferno. Shangguan is the head of the Black Dragon Society and they are soon accused by Tien Feng and the East Side Gang of hiding the son of Jianwen. When Shangguan refuses to hand over the baby, his society is attacked and nearly all are killed except his daughter (Cheng Pei-peï) and his nephew (Wu Fung). These two escape taking the baby with the intention of delivering him to Shangguan's brother seventy miles to the south. To get there they have to pass through many blockades with Tien Feng and his deadly female dart-throwing companion constantly on their heels. On the way they pick up the assistance of the king of beggars (Yeung Chi Hing), his sister (Ouyang Shafei), a small girl and two beggar disciples (Li Kun and Yueh Hua).

Most of the film consists simply of the trio of Cheng Pei-peï, Wu Fung and Yueh Hua making their way to their destination to deliver the emperor's son and trying to avoid detection through various disguises all along the way – but unfortunately there is no way to disguise a baby's cries and you can count on this baby crying at all the wrong times. Whenever that happens, the disguises get dropped and the swords come out as they chop their way through numerous opponents with the baby strapped securely to Cheng Pei-peï's back. The action is a bit chaotic and frenzied with a large body count, but generally is of the wild swinging/bodies running into sword variety – but it is still fun to see Cheng Pei-peï wielding her sword with determination and having five guys go down with one stroke.

My favorite part is at the end when all the good guys and all the main bad guys end up in one place with a fight to the death impending – and the old beggar king says, “Kids, kill them” which they then proceed to do.

Sadly, it appears that the baby never did become emperor – if he existed at all that is. Yongle who was the son of the first Ming Emperor (Hongwu) ruled from 1402 to 1424 as the third Ming emperor and is considered by those in the know to be one of the great rulers in Chinese history. Jianwen was actually only 25-years old when he died – though in the film an elderly actor plays him.

**Rebel Of Shaolin AKA Shaolin Traitor (Taiwan, 1977: Chiang Nan)** - Shaolin Temple is in turmoil as monks are murdered and a precious artefact is stolen. A wrongly accused monk (Carter Wong) will have to uncover the actual traitor as the royal family seems eager to see Shaolin destroyed and counts on the events going on at the temple to make matters worse.

A pretty bad low budget flick. The locations, settings and costumes are nice (I must admit I'm a sucker for Fu flicks with monks and temples, I'm always pleased when these are involved), the soundtrack is really cool (a tune that sounds like something out of a Spaghetti Western), but that's about it.

The story is really confused (though I wanted to see how all this would end), the action is okay, but not that abundant nor great (kudos to the variety of weapons used though - staffs and swords are used a lot and Carter Wong even uses a pair of sai -, but you get some nice shapes as well), the characters are either uninteresting (I never felt too invested in what would happen to Carter Wong, though I had some sympathy for him and Polly Shang-Kwan) or annoying (especially Doris Lung as the princess, she's so obnoxious I ended rooting for whoever would kill her), you also get the usual character in drag that fools everybody but the audience (and here it's Polly Shang-Kwan as Carter Wong's unexpected ally) and the little there is of comedy is more obnoxious than funny (thinking of a scene involving supposed slapstick between Wong and Polly Shang-Kwan), except for a very badly dubbed crazy old master who gets unintentionally funny (because his voice is so bad I can't really describe it).

Actually, the only thing that made me raise an eyebrow was the strangest set-up for an ambush. Carter Wong passes by two guys who are whipping the crap out of a poor lady and it turns out the three were a bunch of fighters out to get him - even the chick is fighting him. Yeah, cause at a point in the movie Wong keeps being attacked by fighters after Shaolin issued a warrant (as everyone believes him to be the murderous thief since he kept being found next to the victims) ... And I believe one of them was Chang Yi (who actually only makes a cameo here - and I failed to spot the recurring Lung Fei, who is also in this one according to hkcinemagic).

Basically, I'd put it on par with *Duel Of The Tough* another Shaolin-related movie I saw recently. The ambush and Polly Shang-Kwan are what I liked the most (I find Polly Shang-Kwan really cute, even when she's dressed as a man - actually, am I the only one who thinks chicks in these films look really cute when they are pretending to be dudes ? Happened to me with several films, and I sometimes even find them cuter as dudes actually...). This film is really worth a watch for the completely unfitting dub of the crazy old master, and/or if you're a Carter Wong or a Polly Shang-Kwan fan (or a fan of both, or if you'd like to see them team up, though they have little time together really).

**Rebellious Reign (Hong Kong, 1980: Fong Chiung)** - Fantastic independent movie. Very epic and grand in scale, with a solid story, some good acting performances, and some fantastic shapes. Jimmy Lee is the lead, who pulls some crisp shapes and turns in a solid acting performance as well. I only recognized him from one other film, *Wily Match*; Which he had some great fighting in, but that was over all a bad movie.. Other stand outs were Kwan Yeong Moon (a favorite of mine), who played a savage bad ass, Norman Chu who showed good acting chops, and Alan Chui who put his acrobatic skills on display. (as well as directing the action.) A strong theme of the price of ambition complimented the story and epic feel of the movie. The story, while it isn't going to shock you, is solid and never bores you between the squabbles! (Thanks to good acting.) Fantastic bloody, epic finale, with an ending that actually breaks the typical Kung Fu mold a little bit.

My only gripe about the movie is that the plot moved way too fast. I didn't think I would ever say this about an independent Fu movie, but this could have stood to be an hour longer. There were a couple instant, jarring time skips. With the scale of this movie, it's to be expected, but there could have been a better transition; like a time stamp at least. Haha.

Anyway, great grade A stuff, I will watch it again. I don't like putting number ratings on this stuff, so that's all I'll say. (The samurai thread is an exception!) I would like to see more of Jimmy Lee, this guy is a shapes machine! He is actually a good kicker too, albeit he didn't look quite as good when locking up with KYM(which is to be expected).

**Red Phoenix, The (Taiwan, 1978: Tyrone Hsu Tien-Yung)** - Nice old school flick with a top cast of David Chiang, Polly Kuan, Lo Lieh, Jack Long & Yueh Hua amongst others.

A mysterious masked assailant, referred to in the film as "Red Dress Man", is picking off members of Uncle Shen Pei's martial arts school one by one, only promising to reveal his true identity after he has killed 10 students...

There is just so much to enjoy in this fun and fast paced film - whether it be trying to guess who the killer is amongst at least half a dozen red herrings or just appreciating the visual elements such as the wicked looking two-faced red mask that the assassin wears or the phony looking deadly projectile that is the Red Phoenix!

Fights are an even mixture of hand to hand combat and footwork with a healthy dose of acrobatics and some wire work, though all of the fights take place outdoors in wide open spaces. I particularly liked the fight between Lo Lieh & "Red Dress Man" in the heavy rain at the cemetery and the tag team of Polly Kuan and David Chiang towards the end. Jack Long will initially seem wasted in a 'bookish' role at first to viewers - though this changes nearer the end of the film. Yueh Hua and Lo Lieh are also welcome additions in the small amount of time that they actually appear on screen.

Red Phoenix is a highly recommended old school classic which is never boring owing to it's great cast & frequent scenes of kung fu action - plus there is a small dose of comedy (which is dispensed with in the later reels) to keep things moving briskly along. Thanks FlashLegs for allowing me to finally view this after years of wanting to see it.

**Redress (Hong Kong, 1969: Kiu Chong)** - So Dan plays a young man whose father and men have been murdered by the General Ping Ao's men. While they believe that he is dead, he hears them talking about their plot to rob the Emperor's gold and frame So Dan and his father, and when they are gone, he flees and finds shelter in his fiancée's (Chen Si Si) house. When they learn about the plot, Chen Si Si, her father and their men go in Ping Ao's house and it's their turn to rob the gold, in order to give it back to the Emperor. Chiao Chuang plays an Imperial officer who wants to arrest So Dan and get the gold, but when he discovers the truth, he helps So Dan and Chen Si Si to reach their purpose. A very good movie with a lot of good fights and an interesting plot. Worth a watch.

**Renegade Master (Taiwan, 1977: Wong Chan Hung) – Shaolin Iron Finger** - Notable for apparently being the first time this film has been available anywhere in the world for the small screen, this release of 'Renegade Master' will be an essential buy for Carter Wong fans. For everyone else this is a pretty average movie that's probably not worth going out of your way for.

Carter Wong stars as the head of a group of revolutionaries forced into betraying his followers when his enemies kidnap his mother. There really isn't much else to the plot. The film really drags for the first half hour or so until the kidnap and the twist in the story is so obvious that it can be the only explanation for Carter's sudden change in character. James Tien is the film's villain who is trying to get hold of a list of names of all of the rebels (as villains in this kind of movie so often are). When Carter finally refuses to be used anymore against his colleagues it leads to a showdown.

Personally I like my fight action to have plenty of leg work but here the choreography is definitely of the more 'fisty' variety as Carter Wong plays a master of 'Iron Finger' kung fu. Some of his opponents show off some great techniques and acrobatics but these moments are too few and far between. The film has one weapon scene which sees Carter using a spear against a swordsman but this is really nothing special at all. On the plus side some of the film's fight scenes are shot against some stunning Taiwan scenery such as the temple seen in 'The Mars Villa' but on the whole the fights themselves are rather unexceptional.

**Rescue, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Shen Chiang)** - The short running time of this film (79 minutes) is a fairly good indication that it was a quickie B movie from the Shaw Studios and it certainly plays out that way. There isn't much here in terms of originality, plot or character development, but it does try to make up for these deficiencies with a few large somewhat enjoyable action set pieces. These do offer some munchies for action junkies who like their body count high and the blood syrup to be purchased by the gallons. Still it's all you can do to keep your attention from wandering far far away to another galaxy when no one is getting sliced and diced and its somewhat bleak ending comes as a relief. This is a bit surprising in that director Shen Chiang was behind the scripts of a few of the martial arts breakthrough films with "Temple of the Red Lotus" and "Twin Swords", but here he gives little attention to developing the characters in a meaningful way - or perhaps those parts were edited out of the film explaining it falling short of the typical 90-minute running time?

The story takes place back in the late 1200's with another one of those darn dynasty changes. The Mongols have swept down from the north and tossed out the Sung dynasty (960-1279) on their bottoms and are trying to impose their control on the populace. The Mongols don't really seem all that bad except for their sense of fashion in which they seem to enjoy accessorizing their head gear with the tails of a dead animal. This is very tacky (like large windshield ornaments that spell out *déclassé* in any language) and one has to wonder just who designed their clothes - didn't they have any gay men among those jolly hordes - they would never have allowed such a fashion faux pas. It is hard enough trying to rule another people who tend to be resentful even if the former rulers raped and pillaged them on a regular basis - but throw on top of that poor fashion sense and you get no respect. As it turned out, the new Mongol dynasty, The Yuan Dynasty, only lasted until 1370 and in those 90 years there were 12 different rulers - and it all comes down to those dead animal tails they wore. So much for the history lesson for today. For a little more information on the Yuan Dynasty, [click here](#):

So at this point in the plot, the Mongols have already taken over and the only chance the Chinese have is to free Lord Wen who has been imprisoned. Lord Wen has the political clout to organize all the different factions into a widespread rebellion, but he is securely locked up far behind the walls of a fortified prison. Nevertheless, a group of patriots decide to spring him - thus the title of the film. The feisty Shih Szu scouts out the prison and reports back to her elders - but along the way she bumps into Lo Lieh who quickly develops a mad grin crush on her. He follows her back and soon shows his great kung fu skills when they all try to kill him for being a spy. Of course he isn't; he is just in love. Their rescue plan entails being arrested and thrown into the same prison as Lord Wen and from there they will rescue him. Huh? Did these same geniuses plan for post-war Iraq? It turns out to perhaps not have been thought out much beyond let's get in and hope we get lucky. As they are being intentionally arrested, Lo Lieh spots them from the room of his favorite prostitute (Ling Ling) and decides to forego his afternoon repast and get arrested too!

These attempts at rescue lead to three different action brouhahas in which the small - and constantly getting smaller - band of patriots fight off a seemingly never-ending parade of bad guys who are willing to take one for the Gipper. Among the scowling Mongol fighters are Chen Chi-chu, Chan Shen and Bolo Yeung. The fights aren't bad - more frantic and fast moving than great choreography - though the over used wirework is very poorly done - with the wires visible on occasion. There is a surprising amount of gore with blood spurting like a fourth of July fireworks display and the landscape is literally littered with dead bodies. Lo Lieh has some fun with a hatchet that he has on a rope and he uses it like a game of tether ball to split numerous skulls.

Shih Szu generally wields a deadly set of knives in her hands along with a near constant pout as she whirls and twirls among the enemy with deadly results. Shaw had brought her over from Taiwan in 1970 to star in "The Crimson Charm" and they planned to push her into replacing their premier female martial arts star, Cheng Pei-pei, who they considered to be getting a little old for martial arts films. Shih fails to really impress in this film as her acting rarely goes beyond the humph stage and her martial arts don't go much beyond waving her arms about and watching guys fall over dead. It was some of her later works that solidified her reputation. To most Westerners she is probably best known for her role as the sister in *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* as her films have not been the easiest to find in the past. She was to retire in the early 1980's.

**Return Of Bruce (Philippines, 1977: Joseph Kong)** - aka *Bruce's Return*; *Dragon Returns*; *Ninja vs. Bruce Lee* - Courtesy of the "Collection Ceinture Noire" from FIP, here's yet another Bruceploitation movie. I have 8 of the 10 titles, and it seems like Bruceploitation flicks make up 2/3 of the collection - also, don't expect the Ninja on the cover to show up cause like pretty much all of their other releases, the artwork has NOTHING to do with the movie (hell, there's Gordon Liu on the artwork of *Enter The Game Of Death*).

This one sees a Chinese guy (played by Bruce Le) who wanted to visit a cousin bust a woman trafficking ring. The plot wasn't very engaging, so I essentially browsed through the thing and while I must have seen about half of it (first 10 minutes and last half hour), here's what I got:

- nice alternative version of the *Enter The Dragon* theme - but it seems like almost EVERY Bruce Le movie has that theme in it;
- the most flaming character ever (that guy is soooo gay it's just ridiculous - I don't have anything against gay people, but this guy is a freaking stereotype);
- a bad guy is seen wearing a Charlie Brown shirt (yeah, it's a detail, but I couldn't help catching it);
- many people, especially the White baddies, seem to have stayed in the sun for too long;
- Bruce Le fighting two hairy-chested Gwailos in white pants has to be the most hilarious fight scene I've seen this year - courtesy of him trying to recreate the original Bruce Lee's fight with Chuck Norris in WOTD;
- Bruce Le ruining an emotional scene by overreacting to his girlfriend's death (but to be fair, he seems to be overreacting for the whole 90 minutes this film runs) - actually, his reaction is so quick you don't have time to feel sorry for the poor girl;
- WTF are Lo Lieh and Kong Do doing here ?! Anyway, they have some nice action and are fun to watch - though you can't help but wonder how they went from playing in great Shaw Bros movies to making a Bruceploitation with Bruce Le;

Overall ? Not too bad of a film, it's great for laughs and the action is enjoyable. Maybe I'd put this one in my top 5 Bruceploitation films.

**Return of Shanghai Joe (Italy, 1974: Adalberto Albertini)** - The heroic kungfu bad-ass of the Old West is back, and this time he's not alone -- which is part of the problem with this film, which is a very flawed, somewhat ridiculous, but fairly entertaining sequel to the superb *Fighting Fists of Shanghai Joe*. This sequel lacks a number of things that made the first film one of my favorites: no cool spaghetti western score, no brutal violence or gore, no cool showdowns, and worst of all, no Chen Lee, the star of the first film. They list a guy named Chen Lee in this film as well, but it sure as hell isn't the same guy.

*Return of Shanghai Joe* is pretty much a comedy in many parts, with fight choreography by the Three Stooges. The new actor playing Joe is okay. He doesn't do a whole lot in the way of cool martial arts, and for my money, I like Chen Lee (the original) better. I know when you're kicking ass on fat cowboys, you can't have spectacular, intricate martial arts choreography, lest you end up with flying, flipping cowboys that look completely and totally ludicrous (check out the film *Once Upon a Time in China and America* for that). But Chen Lee still managed to make his fights interesting, and they were a lot bloodier. This film is very much a PG. The new Shanghai Joe, who actually looks a little bit like Alexander Fu Sheng minus Alex's disco hair, doesn't pull out people's eyeballs or tear their scalps off or their entrails out. A kinder, gentler Shanghai Joe isn't exactly what I was hoping for. And after refusing to use guns last time out, even talking about how shameful they are during his final fight with the rival Asian martial arts master, this time Joe isn't above whipping out a pistol and dispensing of a few villains without using his empty fists.

On top of that, for the first half of the film, every time Shanghai Joe launches into a fit of kung-fury, the soundtrack blasts out some Beatles sounding tune. After about an hour of every punch being accompanied by music reminiscent of "Yellow Submarine," they finally stop that nonsense, like the director walked in and caught the sound guys adding that end and was like, "What the hell are you doing?" But even without the poppy Shanghai Joe Fight Theme, the soundtrack is pretty unspectacular. I thought the first one was quite cool, though I think most of it was stolen from *Have a Good Funeral*, *Sartana Will Pay*, or maybe that film stole from Shanghai Joe. Either way, it was a damn cool soundtrack. This one is pretty lame.

In addition, Joe's race is not an issue at all, save for the occasional obligatory "That Chinaman ain't human!" as he jumps over walls and stuff. This is actually sort of cool, as the racial issue is always the crux of this sort of film, and this time around, they were like, "Fuck it. Let's just have him kick ass." But at the same time, it makes Joe less heroic. In the first film, he was a total outcast and loner struggling against insurmountable odds, with only a few of those always useless Mexican peasants that fill these films and one fine Senorita by his side. He was the classic lone

hero, and it was great. This time, Joe has ladies and friends all over the place. He's even made a US Marshall! I'm glad he succeeded in life, but I also liked seeing him as the wandering stranger.

My last complaint about this film is that Joe isn't even really the central character. He's one of three or four (if you count the villain) main characters who all come together at the end to shoot at Klaus Kinski. Again, this isn't necessarily bad, but I liked the way the first film pretty much stuck with Joe and his trials and tribulations as he wandered the West making a name for himself as the greatest ass-kicker in Texas and Mexico.

So once you get over the fact that this film is nothing at all like the first one, is much lighter and sillier, then you just might enjoy it. It still has a lot of action. The plot isn't bad. The new Joe is a decent actor. It's cool to see that his being Chinese is a minor thing, and mostly he's just there to gamble, kick ass, and dispense justice. Klaus Kinski is typically creepy and slightly over-the-top, which he always does well.

Basic plot has Kinski (who was in the first film as the insane scalp collector who gets his own scalp torn off by Joe -- none of that sort of action in this film) trying to swindle some Mexican peasants out of their land, which is rich in oil but poor in everything else. An honest judge comes to town, and instantly makes it his goal to take down the evil Kinski. There's some heroic Mexican guy, some fat snake oil salesman who becomes Joe's number one sidekick, and of course, there's Joe, who always seems to be sleeping right next to where all the evil action is taking place, so he can leap over a boulder and beat people up.

There are actually a lot of innovations in this film, at least as far as stereotypical plot devices -- like the Chinese man having a wacky sidekick instead of being a wacky sidekick. As in part one, Joe dispenses very little "ancient Eastern wisdom," with only one minor mention of Confucius, no acupuncture, and no mysticism. And of course, none of the merciful pacifism that made David Carradine such a god-awful bore as a kungfu expert wandering the West.

So in the end, I can't really say Return of Shanghai Joe is a good film like the first one. More silly than gritty, more cartoonish than violent, and full of really bad action. I guess it is far less racially offensive than similar films. For some reason, in the US, we still can't get over "flying lice" jokes.

You know, Return of Shanghai Joe pretty much sucks, now that I think about it, but it's still a hell of a lot better than Kungfu or Once Upon a Time in China and America.

**Return Of The Chinese Boxer (Taiwan, 1974: Jimmy Wang Yu)** - Jimmy Wang Yu's follow-up to The Chinese Boxer, which he directed for Shaw's. This Taiwanese independent production ranks as poor in most regards but after the long trek towards the hour mark, Jimmy finally wakes up and gives us some of that wonderful inspired lunacy that really was the driving force of movies such as One-Armed Boxer and Master Of The Flying Guillotine. Best out there-moment being the reanimated Thai fighters (one of them being the late Blackie Ko).

**Return of the Deadly Blade (Hong Kong, 1981: Taylor Wong)** - I liked this one a lot. Indie wuxia, with all the cheap costumes and sets that come with such things. Star studded cast with David Chiang and Kurata in the lead, and cameos from the likes of Lo Lieh and Hwang Jang Lee!

The story is simple, although it starts out seeming like your typical wuxia with bunches of characters, it's basically your typical revenge thing.. So that isn't a strong suit, the end became sort of plot heavy, with twists that were supposed to surprise you (and they did?), but there was no clever build up towards said twists so it didn't matter. Although the story wasn't great, there were some cool "wuxia-like" characters. David Chiang plays a Ti Lung brooding hero well, lol. All of the villains are cool and somewhat memorable, a fire god, a ninja, "golden rings", and the like. There were some funny scenes involving Kurata's character. Who is a low-class clown that happens to be a top fighter by the name of "The Lonely Winner", it was cool seeing him in a less serious role.

Awesome locations, one that comes to mind was an old rope bridge which a fight took place on. The sets on the other hand clearly suffered from the budget, with some pretty cruddy painted on scenes.

The fights throughout were awesome though, with a decent mix of wire work (not OTT) and grounded swordplay. Standout fights are the opening where Hwang Jang Lee and Norman Chu throw down, this is one worth rewatching...it is really a cool fight. Another is Kurata and David Chiang ganging up against Lo Lieh (who is wielding an umbrella and a sword!) on a dock! The end fight was underwhelming as they were focused more on slamming some twists in the sub-par story.

Overall, it was a really entertaining movie. A fight-fest with some of our favorite actors, with solid fight scenes. Sub-par story and ending though. The best part of the ending was laughing at Norman Chu zipping around briskly in a wheel chair.

**Return of the 18 Bronzemen (Taiwan, 1976: Joseph Kuo)** - Though the same three co-stars appear in this sequel made in the same year, their characters are completely different and both Tien Peng and Polly are in it only for a few minutes. The film takes an unusual viewpoint as it completely focuses on Carter Wong, but Wong is the villain in this piece. There really is no hero at all in the film. If you are not a fan of Carter, this might be a tough film to get through. He gives a surly but very physical performance, but at no time in the film does he gain your sympathy.

He is a Prince in the Qing dynasty and when the Emperor dies he changes the will to make himself the successor. Soon news comes to him that the Shaolin Temple is in revolt against him and this sends him into a flashback that takes up nearly the remainder of the film. He goes back ten years when he chanced upon an attractive maiden being attacked and comes to her rescue. He attempts to court her in his gruff manner, but she is engaged to Tien Peng. Carter challenges Tien, but is easily defeated and when Carter learns that Tien was trained at the Shaolin Temple, he decides that he must do the same.

Though he is much too old to begin training, his perseverance impresses the monks and they finally take him in – though they have no inkling of his true identity. While most monks don't attempt to pass the 36 tests until after a decade of training, Carter attempts to do so after only one year. He fails – and nearly dies but he continues to come back. Finally he is forced to leave the temple when his real identity is revealed. Back to the present. Now the Emperor, Carter plans his revenge on the monks when Polly attempts to assassinate him. As we have only seen her once before in his flashback, we have no idea why. She is rebuffed and escapes. End of movie.

Huh? I suppose that there is either a sequel to this or at least there was one planned because otherwise it all makes little sense. The entire film is taken up with the training and there are many loose ends left unexplained. Polly has this final fight and one earlier in the flashback but is wasted other than that. There seems to be a slapdash feel to the film in which the producers used the sets of the first to quickly make the second. Some of the training scenes are interesting but lots of it feels like a repeat of the first film.

**Return of the Hero of the Waterfront (Taiwan, 1973: To Man-Bo)** - Kao Fei's brother works for the boss of a gang. As he works well, his boss gets him promoted. This doesn't please Dai Sai An and the boss' fourth wife, who have an affair, and they frame Kao Fei's brother, telling the boss that he raped his 4th wife.

After being hurt by a palm strike, he seeks refuge at his brother's house, where the boss' men chase him. As Kao Fei doesn't want to hand him over, they fight with him. Kao Fei hides his brother in Jade's house (Pearl Chang Ling) and he goes to his uncle's house in order to get some medicine for his brother.

Finally, the boss' men discover where their target hides but he escapes and they kidnap Jade and her little brother in order to force him to surrender.

The two brothers team up to get revenge for Jade's mother murder and to free the hostages. Before dying, Kao Fei's brother tells his boss that he has been framed and Kao Fei succeeds in punishing Dai Sai An.

A very good action movie, with a good plot ; worth watching.

**Return Of The Kung Fu Dragon (Taiwan, 1978: Yu Chik-Lim)** - While it does have a rather simple plot considering it is fantasy, visuals and design to make genre-fans very comfortable, lack of energy to punch AS a genre-effort is missing from Return Of The Kung Fu Dragon. Sluggish and choppy as Yu Chik-Lim depicts various, fantastical feats, combine that with cheap melodrama and inappropriate touches of light humour and there's struggles to be had. Some cheap but visually interesting highlights, especially the Kaiju-inspired ending might linger but that's a few minutes worth of zany and not part of the intended burst of energy. Starring Polly Kuang.

### **Return Of The One-Armed Swordsman (Hong Kong, 1969: Chang Cheh)**

*"Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!"*

For Chang Cheh's sequel to the influential and successful One-Armed Swordsman, he consciously leaves much of the character drama behind in favour of his love towards Xiaoshan (Ciao Ciao). As these things go, inevitably our hero will face a crossroad where his ultimate decision both is unwilling and about the fact that he still has a responsibility towards the martial arts world. Chang finds time in between the copious amounts of bloodshed, to further the relationship between Fang Gang and Xiaoshan and it presents a refreshing warmth and understanding due to the kind of world they're in, even with their backs wanting to turn from it. Again, it's a testament to Chang's strength as a director of character drama that these themes have never faded to become painful clichés.

Fang Gang (Jimmy Wang Yu, reprising his famous role) made his choice at the end of the first film to leave the martial arts world behind in favour of his love towards Xiaoshan (Ciao Ciao). As these things go, inevitably our hero will face a crossroad where his ultimate decision both is unwilling and about the fact that he still has a responsibility towards the martial arts world. Chang finds time in between the copious amounts of bloodshed, to further the relationship between Fang Gang and Xiaoshan and it presents a refreshing warmth and understanding due to the kind of world they're in, even with their backs wanting to turn from it. Again, it's a testament to Chang's strength as a director of character drama that these themes have never faded to become painful clichés.

It also helps that to have Jimmy Wang Yu so confidently conveying the strength and honor of Fang Gang. As an underdog in the first film who transformed into an honorable hero, there's an interesting plot point here in the sequel that all of the elder clan leaders are being held captive, leading to Fang having to step up as a true leader for the younger generation. At the same time there's a reluctance in Fang towards what this martial arts world stands for. These are character elements that Cheng excels at conveying and still pack poignancy today.

Talking action choreography, again supervised by Lau Kar Leung and Tong Gaai, to my eyes there is quite a leap in technical polish from the first film. Pace in battles is tighter as well as intensity and the number of movements, intricate or not, in each shot is increasing. Being a Wuxia effort, there also crops up some otherworldly techniques assisted by wire-work but at the same time, it's also charming to watch action directing in development. For Jimmy Wang Yu, Lau and Tong also came up with some sharper techniques, based on his limitations as a performer but also playing to the character's honed arsenal of skills. It ultimately is more of a simple cinematic technique but power is effectively created through the staging and editing.

Out of the myriad of recognizable faces such as Tien Feng, Chung Wa, Lau Kar Leung, Ti Lung, Wu Ma and Chan Sing, Essie Lin Chia logs a memorably evil performance as The Lady Of Thousand Hands.

**Return of the Red Tiger (South Korea, 1977: Nam Gi-Nam)** - Bruce Le must have done this movie as a favor to someone because it's like no other Bruce Le movie I've seen. Bruce plays a retarded homeless mute who drinks milk (the milk part will make sense later). You can tell he's a bum because he wears those bum gloves that have the fingers cut off. He was turned mute by a traumatic event when he was younger, something to do with his mother, I wasn't paying attention. This movie was only 82 minutes long, but it seemed way longer. Possibly due to the fact that it was boring. The basic plot is that everyone is after some microfilm. Why is it in every 70's movie someone is after microfilm? In the 90's it was the same way except the technology changed and it's a disc. One guy in the movie has one eye and an eye patch on the other eye. His patch doesn't even have a string to hold it on, it's just a black patch stuck over his eye. Turns out the guy has the microfilm. He peels off his eye patch and hands over the microfilm which was in his false eye. If you have to watch this movie just fast forward to the end and watch the fighting. The fighting is actually pretty bad, but much more watchable than the rest of the movie. Bruce uses cat style kung fu with lots of cheesy sounding cat sounds effects. That's why he is always drinking milk because he uses cat kung fu. It's pretty funny as Bruce crawls around on the ground on his hands and knees making these crazy cat noises. Oh yeah one of the actresses listed in the credits is named Supple Woo. Damn, I love that name, sounds like a porn actress or something.

**Return Of The Tiger (Hong Kong, 1977: Jimmy Shaw)** - Bruce Li, a narcotics syndicate... guess who's bringing down who? Despite talky sections with poor attempts at tension while operating within a stock story, Return Of The Tiger is one to demonstrate how Bruce Li could escape Brucesploitation trappings. Showcasing confidence in the multiple fight scenes, the various gym fights are good signs of power and danger that Return Of The Tiger then build upon nicely. All culminating in an end brawl with Li's endless fight with Western villain Paul Smith (from Midnight Express) whose power and size are put to excellent use. There's a reason you take away power, invincibility and danger from Return Of The Tiger. Li and Smith were the poster boys of the movie and delivered. Also with Angela Mao, Lung Fei and Chang Yi.



**Returned Single-Legged Man (South Korea, 1974: Lee Doo-Yong) - aka The Korean Connection** - An early effort from prolific Korean director Lee Doo-yong (*Bruce Lee Fights Back from the Grave*, *Secret Agents 2*), a guy who made over 60 movies over the course of his career, 'Returned Single-Legged Man' gives us the dream pairing of Han Yong-cheol (*Strike of Thunderkick Tiger*) and the Mad Korean himself, Kwan Yung Moon (*Kung Fu Zombie*).

When Yong-cheol's father dies when he's still just a child, he's taken in and raised by a gang. However when he falls in love with a well-to-do girl, he asks to leave the gang so that he can start a new life together with her. Eventually, his adopted father (who's also the boss) agrees, on the condition that he helps the Japanese steal a package containing some important Korean documents and a stash of money. Yong-cheol agrees to do it, and intercepts a masked man transporting the documents, assaulting him and stealing the briefcase that he's carrying.

The two Japanese who are accompanying him then finish off the masked transporter, killing him with a sword, however when they take the mask off, it's revealed to be the brother of the girl Yong-cheol's set to marry. Not only has Yong-cheol betrayed his country, he's also responsible for the death of his future brother-in-law, and all because of those damn Japanese! This leads to him becoming a drunken recluse, and it's not until his old friend, played by Yung Moon, learns that the Japanese leader has kidnapped Yong-cheol's former bride to be, that he gets his act together and decides to make amends for the mistakes of his past.

It's safe to say that before the likes of Hwang Jang Lee and Casanova Wong became big names in the kung-fu genre....there was Han Yong-cheol. He was a familiar face in the Korean action scene in the mid-70's, and had that rare combination of looks, charisma, and an ability to deliver the moves. In 'Returned Single-Legged Man' he gets ample opportunity to unleash his barrage of kicks, and they're a joy to behold. Be it taking on a cell full of thugs with his hands tied behind his back, or a room packed to the brim with katana wielding Japanese villains, once his kicks get started they don't stop.

He's often backed up by Kwan Yung Moon, in a rare good guy role. He plays a flute playing Korean Freedom Fighter, a flute which just happens to disguise a metal pipe, and he also gets plenty of opportunities to use both the pipe and his feet. The fight scenes in *Returned Single-Legged Man* feel ahead of their time for a 1974 production, and normally involve one or two versus many. Whenever they kick off (pardon the pun) there's a kind of animalistic intensity to them, as the screen becomes a barrage of kicks, screams, and bodies falling all over the place. The frantic camerawork also compliments this feel, while still capturing all the movements.

Notably a very young looking Hwang Jang Lee (with short hair!) plays one of the Japanese henchmen, and even gets a couple of lines and a few kicks as well, but he's far from the threat that he'd become just a few years later. All in all *Returned Single-Legged Man* is well worth a watch as an entry into the China/Korea vs. Japan genre. It's got fantastic Taekwondo, a surprisingly decent story, and early screen appearances from Han Yong-cheol, Kwan Yung Moon, and Hwang Jang Lee.

**Revenge is Sweet (Taiwan, 1974: Li Su)** - Shao Zai Yuen (Lu Xiao Hui) witnesses her father's murder by Mad Wolf Biao (Kao Fei) and she becomes mentally ill : when she is asleep, she goes in town and fights with all the men she meets and the day after, when she's awake, she doesn't remember anything. 6 men are killed and 11 are badly hurt, so, her mother asks for the help of a monk, who keeps Zai Yuen in a closed place during two years in order to cure her and help her getting rid of the hate she has in her mind and her heart.

During these two years, she improves her kung fu and succeeds in mastering the Snow Flower Whirlwind kick. When the monk thinks that she is ready to go, he lets her go and she goes in a town where there is a martial arts tournament, in order to test her kung fu and see if she will be able to beat Mad Wolf Biao.

There, she learns that the government offers a reward to the winner of the tournament in order to get rid of Mad Wolf Biao. Another good fighter nicknamed Six Directions Boxing (Su Chen Ping) wants to win the tournament in order to pay the doctor because his wife is ill.

When she learns that Shao Zai Yuen is a very good fighter, Six Directions Boxing's sister asks her to let win her brother because of her sister-in-law's illness, but Zai Yuen refuses and when she is on her way to go to the tournament, Six Directions Boxing's sister hurts her and try to make her being late to the tournament, but she fails.

As expected, Shao Zai Yuen wins the tournament and she gives the reward to Six Directions Boxing, but when he

arrives at home, it's too late and his wife is already dead.

Then, he returns the money to Zai Yuen and when he learns that she wants to kill Mad Wolf Biao, he decides to help her. This a superb action movie with a very good story. Actress Lu Xiao Hui is a good fighter and that's too bad that she only played in 5 movies and only in 2 martial arts ones !

**Revenge of the Drunken Master (South Korea, 1981: Gang Beom-Gu) – aka Dragoneer 7: The Tremendous** - More Korean confusion thanks to the guys at Asso Asia Productions (aka Godfrey Ho!). For a start this is touted as an apparant sequel to 'Drunken Master', despite the fact that 'Drunken Master' was made 6 years prior, in 1978.

Also, Johnny Chan, a Jackie Chan clone, is clearly sporting a look which is made to imitate Jackie's appearance in 'The Young Master', which was made 4 years earlier in 1980, which begs the question if this is in fact a 1984 production at all.

I've been on an old-school Korean kung-fu movie kick lately, and despite their poor reputation (which had kept me away from watching them for so long), I've actually been finding them quite enjoyable. 'Revenge of the Drunken Master' however, is the first one in my recent viewings which makes me understand why they have the reputation that B they do.

Apart from the most obvious stuff, such as when a character opens a temple door and there's a truck cruisng along the road in the distance for all to see, it also contains a story which makes hardly a lick of sense. Johnny Chan, who has a missing tooth for the duration of the runtime, has found a way to use acupuncture that makes people laugh uncontrollably. Somewhere along the way it's explained that he used the technique on a corrupt official, so a cop played by Eagle Han is on his tail.

But wait, the ninja group also want to get rid of the drunken boxers! The head of the ninja group is played by Chang Il-shik, who has a sub-serviant slave that follows him around on all fours, and whom he pets whenever he's sat on his throne. What's the connection between the Johnny Chan / Eagle Han plot and the Ninja / Drunken Boxers plot? The answer is very little, however far from being a copy & paste movie, it looks to genuinely be an actual production, but one which has either been incompetently put together, or Ho has chopped up to the point of complete incoherence.

Somewhere in the middle of the plot Johnny Chan falls over the sleeping Drunken Master, who proceeds to explain that he's a leper, and then train Chan in the art of 'Space Fist' (wait...isn't it supposed to be drunken boxing!?) for the accumulative time of less than 10 seconds. The end result is a final fight that see's Chan & Eagle Han teaming up to take on Chang Il-shik.

The last fight does a little bit to redeem proceedings, although it's mostly due to its bizarreness. Eagle Han is suitably intense as always, and really should have had more of a career, and Il-shik sports a crazy weapon. In one of the nice cultural references to a weapon you'd only find in a Korean movie, he uses a pair of cymbals, each attached to the ends of a long piece of brightly colored material, which he proceeds to equally play (yes, play like a musical insturment), and throw as a kind of flying guillotine.

When he first throws the weapon at Chan it's absurd, then the scenes goes on for so long it becomes boring, then at some point when it's still going it crosses back into the absurd again. As the fight progresses things get more and more weird....Eagle Han keeps attempting to stick his fingers into Chan's belly button, which somehow gives him special powers, and the finishing move is one of the most dumbfounding scenes I've witnessed. I'm still not sure exactly what happened, but it was hilarious.

All in all, it's safe to say that 'Revenge of the Drunken Master' is one of the lesser entries in the Korean kung-fu genre cannnon.

**Revenge of the Iron Fist Maiden (Taiwan, 1972: Wu Fei Chien) - aka Deadly Fists** - One can only assume that title is a re-labelling for the western market as the main protagonist here is definitely male; seemingly more than a little influenced by Jimmy Wang Yu.

When a young woman, the 'Iron Fist Maiden', discovers her father dying at the side of the road, she sets off to find the men responsible and stumbles into a plot concerning some hidden treasure. The villains hold one half of a treasure map while the other is held by a stoic and mysterious loner; very much in the Jimmy Wang Yu mould of brooding hero, complete with stubble. The film is more concerned with the villains attempts to get hold of the map than it is with the 'Maiden's quest for revenge. She also seems to be a bit less handy at fighting than the main hero who also gets the limelight when it comes to action scenes.

This is a Korean production with action very similar to the 'basher' movies of the early seventies; marked by less stylised action and rather frenetic fight scenes. While this is probably less accomplished than the Hong Kong efforts of the same era, it still contains some effective action sequences where the heroes face multiple attackers. Neither of the two leads look particularly graceful as martial artists but they're certainly no worse than Jimmy Wang Yu either.

I find that the enjoyment from these films comes not from expecting technical expertise but rather having an appreciation for the energy and angst portrayed on screen. The story here is engaging and allows the tension to build sufficiently to allow the angst to come through.

**Revenge of the Kung Fu Mao (Taiwan, 1977: Ting Shan-Hsi) - aka Big Foot Mama** - A pointless and confusing tale of corruption and revenge. A dispute over water rights results in a plan to buy some pumps to help distribute water more evenly. Unfortunately, when Wong Tieng Tsai goes to town to buy the pumps, he gambles away the villagers' money in a horse race and puts his entire family in jeopardy. His wife is a "big-footed country girl" named Kuei Ying (Angela Mao) and they have a young son. He also has a brother named Erh Kang (Wong Tao), who is a good fighter with a hot temper. The two of them go to track down the missing money and find that Tieng Tsai has turned to evil and now works for the horse racing thugs. They also start learning kung fu from one of the mayor's military officers, and Kuei Ying masters her "bench style" of fighting. At some point, Erh Kang inexplicably falls in with the crooks which causes Kuei Ying to stage an assault on their headquarters. Even more inexplicably, Tieng Tsai switches loyalties again and runs off with Kuei Ying after a failed attempt to kill her and kidnap his son. Huh? The increasingly confused plot eventually leads to an all-out kung fu free-for-all pitting Erh Kang and Kuei Ying against every thug in town. With everyone dead, their revenge is complete. Cut! Roll the credits!

Not one of Angela Mao's better films, but she does have a couple of decent fights towards the end. At the beginning of the film she's a crude and undisciplined brawler, but she steadily refines her technique until she becomes the graceful hard hitter that we know and love. While her bench fighting scenes come off as a bit silly, her footwork is wonderful and she performs some nice sword fighting as well. The majority of the film focuses on Wong Tao's fighting, which is executed well and fairly entertaining. The plot flails about aimlessly, serving only to push the two leads to the point of no return and the anticipated final showdown.

**Revenge of the Lady Fighter (1973)** - A group of bandits regularly terrorize the inhabitants of a small village, raping and killing. A man knowing martial arts proposes to help them to get rid of the bandits and teaches them his science. Later, when the bandits come again, the men of the village fight them and one of them, ignoring the orders of the teacher, kills the chief of the bandits and his friends do the same for the other bandits.

The teacher tells them that he is ashamed by their attitude and the woman who he saved from the bandits, Rosa, tells them that they are as bad as the bandits and they leave the village, after killing the teacher. Before dying, the teacher asks Rosa to not let them do bad deeds. She promises and begins a very hard training to become a good fighter and when she meets the bandits, she fights them.

Two of her friends from the village are now policemen and, as she has helped them to arrest some bandits, the police asks her to help her friends to arrest the rest of the bandits and they finally succeed in doing it. Good movie and good fights.

**Revenge of the Shaolin Kid (Taiwan, 1978: Yu Han-Hsiang) - aka Master of Death** - MASTER OF DEATH is a very typical kung fu film from Taiwan with the usual revenge-focused storyline. The hero of the piece I found more than

a little big-headed; we're introduced to him as his wise old master sends him on his way, proclaiming that he's spent 18 years teaching him everything he knows so anything else would be a waste of time.

Chi Kuan-Chun heads back to his old township to discover a conspiracy surrounding the death of his parents. He swears vengeance on the man responsible, but discovering the guy's identity proves to be tricky, and meanwhile a number of deadly martial arts masters stand in his way. What follows is near-constant action, although sadly none of it is very exciting.

Kuan-Chun makes for a wooden hero and the film only comes to life when better actors show up in support, such as Wu Ma in a gambling scene or Lo Lieh in a stock cameo appearance. I liked some of the outdoor scenery but the fight scenes are too ordinary and cheap-looking to really entertain. Unfortunately, MASTER OF DEATH is a film like its title; completely forgettable.

**Revenge of the Shaolin Master (Taiwan, 1979: Joe Law)** - When a consignment of money and rice intended for poor immigrants is robbed by bandits, Lin Chan Hu (Tan Tao Liang) narrowly manages to escape with his life. However on his return home he finds that he has been framed for the robbery by a local businessman, Ching Chu (and you don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to work out who is really responsible).

Lin Chan Chu manages to escape and goes into hiding while the local magistrate despatches an inspector to the town to investigate the event. The inspector soon tracks Lin down and arrests him again although he has his doubts over who is really responsible. Of course Ching Chu isn't just going to sit back and let himself get arrested which inevitably leads to much bloodshed.

With Yuen Woo Ping shaping the action and the likes of Yuen Shun Yi and Yuen Kwai helping out with bit part roles you would expect the action to be of a high standard. Add in to that the fantastic leg techniques of Tan Tao Liang and you get some truly wonderful kung fu moments. I wouldn't say that the film is off the scale but its certainly pretty high as Tan Tao Liang's multiple height kicks are combined with some stylish and intricate hand techniques. There's also some nice weapons use at different points in the film including Lung Fei's long sword and some 3 sectioned staff from the Ching Chu character. A minor complaint is that one of the fight scenes at the end, where the two heroes are forced to fight to choose who is to be tortured to death, seems a little contrived but on the whole the fights are justified by the plot.

And speaking of the plot, the story is certainly engaging enough, throwing in a bit of intrigue and even a little romance between Lin Chan Hu and a servant girl held captive by the main villain. Tan Tao Liang gives a better than usual dramatic performance (I find he sometimes seems a little stiff) but it's his kicks that really grab the attention.

**Revengeful Swordswoman (Taiwan, 1979: Artis Chow)** - aka **Heroine of Shaolin** - I have conflicting release dates on this film, but I'm more tempted to go with 1978, since 1981 appears to be an Ocean Shores re-issue date. Really, the title says it all. Judy Lee has been learning kung fu so that she can avenge her father's murder. Her master confesses to the murder, attempting to goad Judy into killing him, but he's instead killed by a wandering swordsman who takes a liking to Judy. But her revenge doesn't end there. She's also been framed for the slaughter of someone's family and goes to investigate the claim, killing anyone who dares to stop her. When she finally gets to the bottom of the conspiracy, she's in over her head, but miraculously her old teacher shows up to help her. Pretty nifty trick, considering he was burned and buried at the beginning of the film...

A good kung fu film that's a non-stop string of action pieces for Ms. Lee. She looks great and her fighting is superb. Unfortunately, the film is a complete pan-and-scan disaster, making me want to pull out my hair in frustration. Apart from a long and pointless brothel set piece and the confusing climactic showdown, this film offers a great helping of intense girl fu. Lots of fun!

**Revengeance Superlady (People's Republic of China, 1986: Chuen Chuen-Tau, Yeung Kai-Tin)** - aka **Lucky 13** - Mainland Chinese kung fu/sword epic produced at the height of the the Jet Li/ShaoLin Temple/"authentic Chinese wu shu" craze of the 1980s featuring high level wu shu players from the Beijing Wu Shu Academy. Epic feel, nice cinematography, authentic (Beijing area) locations and nice story. You will recognize the stars. The leading lady co-

starred in "Shaolin Temple 2". Yau was the star of the "South Shaolin Master" films. Wong starred in a Wong Fei Hung knockoff. The story is a bit typical (girl trains and gets revenge for killer of family), but the wu shu is very good. Weapons galore. The film's only minor flaws: 1. One dead spot (an implausible sidetrack involving a wimpy scholar to whom 13th Sister takes in interest). 2. Choreography for all three stars (particularly Yau Kin Kwok) could have been more aggressive and crisp.

**Revenger (Taiwan, 1980: Pao Hsueh-Li) – aka Shaolin Revenger** - Mao Cao (whose brother Mad, by the way, disavows any knowledge of that beef disease named after him) is a ruthless Asian Mafioso who is given to wearing frilly kimono style robes because, it's like, the 12th century or something. Anyway, his chief rival is a mad as a mung bean bad ass named Shih Tzu (or Chou Tu or something like that). Shih/Chou goes around the countryside breaking up criminal activity and revenging people (thus the title monkier...get it?) and it's hard for a Manchu-ed mobster to get his misdemeanor on when there's a goody two-thongs score settling up the place. So Mao gets his fellow felons to join him in an ambush. They kill Shih/Chou and hide his bones (perhaps for later, when they make their bread). Mao then experiences some metaphysical payback when he learns his sister, How Now Brown, is preggers with Shih/Chou's son. He disowns her and she ends up living with Shih/Chou's drunken cockney brothers, the bickering boobs known as Frick-san and Frack-san. Eventually, little baby Chou Tu, christened Chou Shu (guess "Jr." was too simple) comes crawling out of the womb, pissed off and ready to retaliate. Unfortunately, it takes his mom 18 years to spill the beans about Mao and his daddy-destroying ways.

End of Act 1 – Everyone take a deep breath. Here we go again.

Chou is brainwashed by his mother (who immediately kills herself afterward) to never raise his sword in anger. He must not get revenge on Mao. So the confused kid goes after the boss's "business" associates instead. He discovers that a local lardass has his father's bones, and after a really redundant fight, Chou kills the cad with his father's femur. In the meantime, we learn that Mao murdered a powerful family in the small town that harbored Shih Tzu all those years ago because, well, because he's evil, that's all. Unfortunately, this act of patricide leaves the couple's kids completely kung fu less. So Mao adopts the boy and girl and raises them as his own. They grow up to be fierce warriors and willing to do whatever Mao tells them. Naturally, when the over-eager leader learns that Shih's sire lives, he puts out a contract on him. Everyone wants to kill Chou and all he can do is concentrate on his pappy's patella. When everyone finally meets up, it's like Hamlet except without all the iambic pentameter.

Whewwww – Act II down. Get ready for Act III...

There is some sword fighting. We witness a little martial arts action. People die. Honor is restored. Dead fathers are avenged. People named Mao regret the chairman-like title. Everyone hopes their paycheck clears. Names are changed to protect the innocent.

Imagine a time in your life when you've been the most bored and the most perplexed at the same time. Perhaps you were doing a 5000 piece puzzle depicting the mating rituals of albino sea frogs. Maybe you were sitting for the SAT, only to realize as you open the booklet to begin testing that you had spent the entire night before doing hits from your best friend's beer bong. It could be that time when you visited your maiden aunts in Key Biscayne and they regaled you with stories of their bunion surgery (complete with graphic pictures and diagrams). Or possibly you found yourself at a stop along the Lilith Fair tour and after striking out with every drunken Dave Matthews fan in the crowd, you suddenly stood shocked as you understood you were actually listening to – and liking – a Tori Amos song! Well, brace yourself liver of the loser's life. You have never had such a more mind-bendingly bad time with a Hong Kong action flick as you will if, by some evil act of fate, you are forced to witness the witless **Shaolin Revenger**. Overcomplicated with so much soap opera plot pointing that daytime drama writers are suing for multiple scene stealing, and mixed with vile voice-over and sloppy cinematics, this arcane Chinese fight fiasco is so dull that massive waxing and buffing still can't produce a shine. Most Asian cultures are concerned about honor, face and respect. All three are up for grabs in this glorified costume crap where the only interesting aspect is when the next major narrative upheaval will occur (the statistical average here is once every 3.78 minutes).

You know you're in trouble when the best scene in this supposedly super cool chop socky film is a sequence where an infant fighter practices his pre-K kung fu moves. Looking like he is suffering from St. Vitus Dance and a decidedly delicate case of itchy ass, this flailing brat has more moves than the Peking version of Menudo and looks more animated than the rest of the cast. His cruel doodie doobie dance exemplifies everything that is wrong with **Shaolin Revenger**. While really retarded looking, this kid is still filled with unbridled, un-toilet trained energy. He wants to be kicking butt and taking names. He wants to do the old double dragon nut cruncher and turn his tiptoes into little givers of Bangkok ballsack magic. But the rest of the movie just wishes to pour on the misguided ruptured spleen

splendor. This **Shaolin** sheep dip is out to make a supreme saga. It wants to toss in the classic elements of family, authority, regality and tragedy to create an epic poem to punch-outs. But all the f.a.r.t. in the world couldn't broaden the broken scope of this lackluster lethargy. With the plot twisting every ten seconds you would assume this movie was as fast-paced as a typical Hollywood love affair. But this movie puts the "Z's" back into dozing with its static attempt at stoicism. Had it stayed with the peewee pugilist and his jokey Jazzercise gymnastics, we could have had some kid crazy kickboxing fun. But not even Judi Sheppard Missett could make **Shaolin Revenger** work out properly.

Indeed, the majority of the flashy fisticuffs suck ginseng root. Now most Hong Kong action movies are known for their intricate fight sequences, the kind of battle ballet where men match moves and wits to find a way to out finesse each other. Usually, such whipsmart wars are welcome additions to the action adventure dynamic. Even with over-amplified and exaggerated sound effects rendering every impact like a nuclear collision, an expertly staged martial arts fight is excitement and skill epitomized. But the mano-y-mano material in this muddled mini-series is just too polished. There is no element of surprise, just one accomplished lunge after another, always followed by a perfect parry until the tempo resembles a senior citizen's ballroom boogie competition. Indeed, if you ever wondered where that wonderful ringside riff - "We came here to watch a fight, not a dance" - got its square circle origins, **Shaolin Revenger** is high on the list of potential starting points. You can actually see the actors stop and count out the next set of swordplay pandemonium, ticking off the time steps one by one. This doesn't mean that the artistry is awful. Indeed, the intricacy of the action can occasionally overcome its terribly stagi quality. But there is none of the modern madness that comes from today's overcomplicated karate. Every bit of martial mania in **Shaolin Revenger** is so precise and polite that you really don't think anyone will die. At most, after the kicking and punching has concluded, a light reprimand seems to be in order.

But by far the worst part of this repugnant retribution saga is its romance novel plotting. There is so much back stabbing, double crossing, dirty dealing and mistaken identity idiocy that you'd swear you were watching a Senate subcommittee. *Dynasty* didn't have this many madcap narrative nuances. Maybe that NBC mini-series mistake *Centennial* had as much unexplained story stacking, but somehow, one gets the feeling that **Shaolin Revenger** could take it in a two falls or 110 minute tale twist tag team match. This movie keeps resetting every 10 minutes or so. We meet the original **Shaolin Revenger**. BANG! He gets killed. We learn of Mao Cao's Sister. WHAM! She's with child and in exile. We are introduced to the drunken brothers. GULP! They are raising their sibling's son, and slapping each other. **Shaolin Revenger** is actually about 18 shifty stories cold compressed into a narrative so gnarled that John Carradine's hands are understandably jealous. Now most Hong Kong action films are not known for their simple stories. But most of the time, the abundance of themes are buried in poetic scenery or somber character close-ups. But **Revenger** has to show everything. And not only show it, but explain and exemplify it over and over again. By the time we get to the swordplay climax, the movie has borrowed from almost every standard saga situation one can imagine. If only Mao Cao had been secretly gay and his own evil twin, the tall tale trifecta would have been hit for big bucks.

**Rider Of Revenge (Taiwan, 1971: Hung Ting-Miu)** - Freed from prison, the quite lethal Ting Fu (Shan Mao) isn't so much being saved but the warriors equipped with claws and horrible scars have an agenda and it's spelled I-o-o-t. Ling Hua (Polly Kuan) enters the scene as one seemingly wanting the law to handle Ting Fu while Lung (Tien Peng) and Wei (Kong Ban) have their own reasons for wanting the cuffed Ting Fu in their possession...

It's a complex web of mystery all up till the last seconds and while a compelling choice as well as the movie coming off like less of a complex Gu Long novel that it seems, director Hung Tin-Miu doesn't come through with much viewer interest in the developments. The Union Film production looks stunning and the action for its time is big, very epic and even set in complex environments such as fire (the brawl at brewery is a very compelling example of this). You also have compelling design choices in the weapons arsenal present, with each crucial character getting a distinctive trait that carries through nicely in the film (ranging from Polly Kuan's coin sword, Kong Ban's whip to the character of Ting Fu using his big cuffs to gory effect). But a serious, twisty turny core is the intent here and *Rider Of Revenge* doesn't quite cut it when it's done. It's something, the intent is admirable but the execution an empty one.

**Righteous Fist, The (Taiwan, 1972: Wang Hung-Chang)** – aka **Furious Ultimatum** - If you're a Chiao Chiao's fan as I am, don't miss this movie. As it's usual in this kind of movies, there's a big villain who wants to rule the region and tries to force a good man to close his kung fu school. He hires Japanese killers and places a spy in the school, who falls for the good man's daughter (Chiao Chiao), but this one has a fiancé (Wong Jun). So, he frames the fiancé and the school is destroyed, but... I don't tell you the end, of course! The plot is good, the fights are good also. Unfortunately, Chiao Chiao has only one real fight in this movie, but what a fight!!! A really good movie!

**Rikisha Kuri (Taiwan, 1974: Joseph Kuo) – aka Rickshaw Man; Rickshaw Driver** - [This] is one of several, it would seem, of Joseph Kuo's movies about bad ass rikisha drivers. This one seems like Kuo channeled *Fist of Fury* and basically said, what if the Bruce Lee disguise was an actual character. Like the Lee film Man's character leaves bodies of his victims where his enemies can see them. Unlike the Lee film, Man is a mediocre martial artist at this point in his career. I've said this before, but some of these guys had to up there game once Bruce Lee hit the screen. No more fake fu! The film is ok, though I preferred Triangular duel to this one.

His favorite techniques- wild jump kicks, chops, elbows and the ability to stomp guys through the floor boards as well as some crazy eyes. The end does deliver a fight that goes on for a solid 15 minutes, and man hits the bad guy with enough blows to kill 3 villains, but he never seems to die until the bitter end. I would say, if you liked Kung Fu, the Invisible Fist, you would like this one.

**Ring of Death (Hong Kong, 1980: Ng See-Yuen) - aka Bastard Kung Fu Master** - Cliff Lok moves to the city to find his father; a general who refuses to admit he has an illegitimate son and gets one of his servants to take the boy under his wing. While Cliff is constantly bullied by the general's other sons, he takes the punishment and secretly learns kung fu from a pair of kung fu masters who are husband and wife.

All trained up, Cliff can then get his own back on the three sons which provides for a suitably intense weapon filled extravaganza about half way through. When it feels like the film might have peaked too early a strange course of events leads to Cliff Lok being entered into a martial arts competition on behalf of the Japanese. Here he faces a ruthless Russian fighter, played by Hwang Jang Lee (?!), in the 'Ring of Death'.

Very much in the mode of other Seasonal films such as 'Snake in the Eagles Shadow' or 'Snuff Bottle Connection' with plenty of excellent action and a well developed storyline. A great performance from Cliff Lok who plays the young kid well with just the right amount of 'mugging' to the camera to emphasise the comedy without going too far. There is quite a bit of comedy in this film and Dean Shek features quite heavily here. I didn't mind him but am aware that his style of tomfoolery is not to everybody's tastes.

As mentioned above, the film climaxes in the 'ring of death' which is less of a ring and more of a wooden platform on stilts, approximately 30 feet up. Certainly high enough for anyone to hurt themselves should they fall off. This provides for a genuinely gripping climax in which Cliff Lok's opera style tumbling contrasts nicely with Hwang Jang Lee's devastating kicks. Although the film features great action from the start, it is all overshadowed by the final bout.

**Ringed Sword (Taiwan, 1969: Kim Lung)** - A young man (Kong Ban) is tracked by his father's murderer's men and a young lady (Fan Ling) helps him to escape them. The evil murderer is the foster-father of another young man who is also seeking revenge for his father's murder and suspects his foster-father; in order to find the truth, he helps Fan Ling and Kong Ban and discovers that Fan Ling is his younger sister. It's a very interesting plot, with very good fights (the final one is something to see !) and Kong Ban and Fan Ling are excellent. This movie is worth to be watched !

**Rivals of Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1974: Wong Feng)** - Wang Feng wrote and/or directed many of the Cantonese Wong Fei Hung films starring Kwan Tak Hing, which this film is an homage to... or a throwback to. The story is rather dull - Wong Fei Hung accidentally offends another Canton master at the Po Chi Lam opening ceremony, and that master swears revenge. Both end up in competition at the annual lion dance festival. The film is ostensibly a comedy, though I don't recall laughing at all. There are a few interesting fight scenes which make the film briefly entertaining, but that's about the only time my interest level was raised above tedium or indifference.

If the rest of Wang Feng's Wong Fei Hung films are this dull, I'm kind of glad they're not available with English subtitles.

**Rivals Of The Silver Fox (South Korea, 1979: Chan Siu-Pang, Kim Jung-Yong)** - Although I can't confirm whether Joseph Lai and Tomas Tang had a hand in producing it, presumably this Korean production (originally called The Barrier and directed by Kim Jung-Yong) was released under their Asso Asia banner as Rivals Of The Silver Fox. Not fully coherent as a revenge tale and really possessing no particular strong traits, with Casanova Wong on the production you can expect some flashes of brilliance at least and the last 20 minutes got the highlight package for the film. With flashes of Wong's extraordinary kicking skills to take note of, more important and memorable is an epic finale with Wong vs a ton of both bronze- and silvermen with some pretty neat ideas within it (the harsh Korean landscape acts as a nice counterpart to many low budget Hong Kong and Taiwan productions of this kind). Echoes of the Lone Wolf And Cub series are also present through Wong carrying with him his child that may hold secrets the opposites at the Devil Valley Lodge are after.

**River Of Fury (Hong Kong, 1973: Cheung Chang-Chak)** - Before he managed to star in a bunch of Shaw Brother's more outrageous films (Super Inframan, Oily Maniac, Mighty Peking Man, Bruce Lee And I), the studio tried to find something for Danny Lee to do, not hitting the mark with River Of Fury. A familiar story of innocence abused and betrayed, thematically much can be squeezed out of it but director Cheung Chang-Chak never manages to find the sparks for the film to ignite into worthy poignancy. No complains about the sets and cinematography plus Lily Ho (Intimate Confessions Of A Chinese Courtesan) is stunning as a Peking opera performer yet it's far from sufficient. Really far. The usual end credits caption "Another Shaw Brother's production" never rang more true. Also with Ku Feng, Tin Ching and Ouyang Shafei.

**Robin Hood, Arrows, Beans and Karate (Italy, 1973: Tonino Ricci)** – aka *Storia di karatè, pugni e fagioli* - RHABAK is an Italian/Spanish co-production (the version I watched was dubbed in German with Portuguese subtitles), so I guess you could call it a Spaghetti/Paella Western. It's also a comedy and a martial arts movie, although it certainly fails at the former. The story is pretty simple. There are two inept bandits named Sam (Dean Reed of The Corsairs) and Buddy (Chris Huerta of City of the Lost Children) who are practically starving to death. They try to join an order of Catholic monks in order to get food, but the experience only puts them in contact with another thief named Colonel Quint (Alfredo Mayo - doing a third-rate impression of Lee Van Cleef's character from For a Few Dollars More). Colonel Quint is hired by the town's local banker, Morgan, to rescue his daughter from a gang of Mexican bandits led by Espartero (Fernando Sancho of Return of the Evil Dead). Quint enlists the help of Sam and Buddy to get the daughter back.

Quint's first plan is to have an old friend counterfeit the ransom money and give it to Espartero. To that end, the three have to save the Goldenhand brothers from the noose. Also to be executed that same day is an effeminate Japanese cook named Mokaiko (Iwao Yoshioka, who also showed up in 7 Hours of Violence), condemned for killing and cooking the sheriff's dog. A big fight breaks out at the execution and our three heroes rescue both the Goldenhand brothers and Mokaiko, the latter of whom starts following Buddy around as if he were his master. When the counterfeit plan goes awry--the lead counterfeiter gave Abraham Lincoln a bald head--they decide to trick Espartero into leaving his stronghold so they can get Baby Morgan out themselves.

The movie's certainly not very funny, nor is it very entertaining. What sets it apart from most other films of the time is that there is practically no gunslinging in the movie. None. All of the action revolves around hand-to-hand combat. There are three traditional Western brawls (one at a saloon, one a restaurant, and one at the bandits' hideout) and three martial arts sequences. The brawls are energetic and well-mounted, with lots of people being thrown onto/through tables and getting bashed with chairs. Then there are the karate sequences:

1. In the first fight, Mokaiko fights his employer, Mr. Chen (the owner of the Chinese restaurant). They get into an argument as to what is better, kung fu or karate. The two trade blows for a minute or so before Mokaiko proves that karate is better. The choreography isn't bad for what appeared to be a European film with no Hong Kong input whatsoever. It's certainly better than your average Jimmy Wang Yu arm-flail-a-thon.
2. In the second fight, Mokaiko fights a bunch of hunters, including a guy in a coonskin cap. Mokaiko can kick fairly well, and the choreography retains the right amount of energy, despite his not fighting anyone who has a chance in hell of winning. The scene preceeding the fight is interesting, since it establishes just how much of a bad-a\*\* Mokaiko is supposed to be: He cuts down a tree with a his karate chops, and then karate chops a rock until sparks start flying, allowing him to start a fire. It's goofy, that's for sure, but kind of interesting.
3. At the end, Mokaiko shows up and beats the [crap] out of the bandits. The choreography is about on par with what I saw in Sonny Chiba's The Streetfighter's Last Revenge, although the camerawork is often too close to Yoshioka to let us see what he's doing.

But really, unless you have some sort of burning desire to see every martial arts-themed Western ever made, you're better off just skipping this.



And there are no arrows in the film, either. The Portuguese and Italian titles (translated as "Karate, Punches and Beans") are lot more accurate.

**Romance Of Book & Sword, The (People's Republic of China, 1987: Ann Hui)** - Little known Ann Hui adaptation of Louis Cha's famous first novel The Book & The Sword. To date, this marks Hui's only foray into martial arts action (outside of a later co-directing stint on *Swordsman*) but watching The Romance Of Book & Sword, Hui's trademarks are spread over it as it at its core is a small scale character drama. This first part (the sequel being Princess Fragrance, shot the same year) clearly have taken a chunk only out of the important template of Cha's work and the 90 minute running time isn't devoted to fleshing out many characters to an epic extent, not even the main ones of rebel leader Chen Jalo and emperor Qian Long. Hui treats her characters simple but still emerges with suitable weight to that relationship and the imminent threat of the Red Flower Society exposing Qian's true heritage as part of the Han people.

Interest is maintained throughout via Hui's almost sedate atmosphere and consciously limited scope. No doubt, this mainland China production boasts fine production values but Hui approaches the scope with a laid back and naturalistic eye, allowing the characters to matter and not the eye candy. Even though there's a decent amount of martial arts action corresponding to the Wuxia traditions, there's more grounded work on display that shows acrobatic brilliance sporadically, especially during the large scale finale.

The entire extent of Hui's work can be judged after taking in Princess Fragrance as well but as a standalone effort, The Romance Of Book & Sword portrays the main piece of the cake of Louis Cha's work well.

**Royal Fist (Hong Kong, 1972: Ting Shan-Hsi) – aka Showdown** - After saving a young lady's life, Wang Yu seeks some help in an inn ruled by "Granny" (excellent Chan Wai Lau in a female role!), where he meets Cheung Ching Ching. He is on the trail of the bandits who killed his father years ago and after marrying Cheung Ching Ching, he discovers that her whole family is in fact a bandit family.

According to the family's rules, he isn't allowed to quit the family, but he escapes with his wife, after challenging his mother-in-law and Granny. When they are on their way, they learn that the bandits who attacked the young lady saved by Wang Yu and killed by them are trying to destroy Cheung Ching Ching's family with the corrupted army's help and the couple returns to help their family and discovers that the family is in fact a family of "Robin Hood" who helps the poors stealing the riches. A very good movie ; Wang Yu and Cheung Ching Ching are excellent, as usual. Don't miss this movie, it's worth to be watched.

**Ruthless Revenge (Hong Kong, 1979: Do Liu Boh) - Invincible Kung Fu; Tricky Kids** - The mood of this film is a lot lighter than the title suggests as the film leans heavily towards visual comedy throughout. Usually such films become more serious for the ending but here it never happens and while this isn't my favourite type of kung fu film the martial arts on display were of a high enough standard to keep my finger from the 'stop/rewind' buttons. In fact Bruce Liang was quite a surprise (as this was my first Bruce Liang film experience) and this certainly makes me want to see more.

Bruce Liang plays 'Glasses', a kung fu enthusiastic and a bit of a spectacle wearing geek, who arrives in a small village hoping to take the job of kung fu teacher. He's not the only one though as 'Funny Face' is also after the position and the two come into comical conflict, both setting up their own schools; 'Glasses' teaching special kicks while 'Funny Face' teaches special hands (Mantis Fist really). However it soon becomes apparent that the reason for the vacancy was because the previous teacher was killed by local gangsters, led by Bolo Yeung, who see the presence of a kung fu master as a threat to their activities.

Although the comical masters manage to see off a few cronies, neither of them are a match for Bolo himself. Glasses' kicks alone aren't quite enough and neither are Funny Face's fists. It doesn't take a genius to see where this is going as the two team up and learn each others styles. It seems that the script writer had a bit of a problem as everything is tied up neatly within an hour and a new, rather unnecessary villain (Bolo's brother) is brought in and the two heroes are required to learn some new kung fu styles, including goose and cat style, from an old master. This section of the film involves a rather nasty piece of animal cruelty as the old master throws a cat and a snake

into a cage with a goose to teach his students how to fight; this bit isn't faked and looks rather harrowing for all three animals especially the cat.

If you can ignore the animal cruelty then the film is quite enjoyable and does have many excellent fight scenes. Bruce Liang's kicking techniques are quite superb but Hon Gwok Choi also excels with his mantis fist style. The fights are fast, fluid, rather well edited and the use of some interesting camera angles makes them seem a bit different from the norm.

**Savage Five, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - A village is held hostage by a group of bandits in need of a safe to be opened and the senseless killings start. A small band of villagers and a thief try and find a way to fight back. With his regular cast and crew Chang Cheh is crafting a basic frame story but it's rare to see him create something THIS dark. With the bandits initially led by Kong Do and Wong Chung that are then eventually joined by Wai Wang and his dual guns, in The Savage Five innocents are executed in cruel fashion continually and it's a really hopeless time. With the likes of Ti Lung, David Chiang, Chen Kuan-Tai and Danny Lee planning in the background to strike back, the movie stays true to its dark tone even when fights are at the forefront. A gritty and violent tone like few Chang Cheh movies is present here and that warrants strong praise. Truly is savage.

**Saviour Monk, The (Taiwan, 1975: Liang Che-Fu)** - I watched this one last night. It's one of those films where you will describe it to your fellow B-movie fans and it will sound like pure insanity from start to finish. However, the actual experience is less than the sum of the occasional moments of awesomeness.

The plot: During the...er...Song Dynasty(?), a prince is born with the spirit of Buddhism already in his heart. He grows up to be an expert martial artist, and his war-monger dad plans to marry him to the princess of the neighboring kingdom so he can consolidate the two armies and go a conquering. The prince agrees to the marriage under pressure, but a visit from the spirit of a Taoist monk is enough to make him change plans and become a monk. Abandoning everything, he wanders around and makes it to a town that is being oppressed by a black magic cult known as the Heaven Religion. Cue the kaiju battles, demonic possession and a smattering of swordplay.

Had the movie just been those things, I would've enjoyed it a lot more. The problem is that it is broken up by scenes of Buddhist philosophizing, which is what ultimately took me out of the film, because of the difficulties I had in reconciling the film's message with my own beliefs. The take-away message of the movie is ultimately "Sex is evil in any context and love and Family are impediments to one's spiritual progress." That really conflicts with my POV that "families can be together for ever" and "exaltation is a Family affair". The fact that our hero attains Nirvana at the end just proves the point that the filmmakers are saying that abandoning one's spouse completely is okay if it's for religious reasons. It feels too individualist to me.

**Scholar Swordsman (Taiwan, 1971: Hou Cheng)** - The movie begins with a masked Cheung Ching Ching who is attacked by a woman and several men whom chief is also masked and fight with weapons like scissors on each finger! She is hurt, and then, it's the opening credits. After the credits, we see a young man attacked by the same rascals, who leave after a few minutes of fighting. The young man goes to a little house and discovers Cheung Ching Ching who is curing her arm. When she wants to leave, we discover that she has a baby. The man tear off her mask and he recognizes his lover and learns by the way that the baby is his own baby.

The rascals who attacked the couple take their orders from a...speaking coffin ! They return to the house and poison the water of the well, which makes the man to be blinded, and then, they put the fire to the house. Cheung Ching Ching and the baby are saved by a man who leaves her and takes the baby with him. And then, without knowing why or when it happens, we discover that Cheung Ching Ching is also blind !!

She and her lover are separated and they join again later, and then, they are again separated and we see her lover who is framed by a girl who is in love with him and drug him in order to sleep with him. They are both kidnapped by " the coffin sect " (it's me who name them this way) and they force the girl to ask Cheung Ching Ching's lover to become a killer under their orders.

After some fights, we discover that the baby has grown up and is a good fighter and, without knowing how or when

it happens too, we discover that he has found his mother, and that she isn't blind anymore ! And we discover that all those who were killed by Cheung Ching Ching's lover are still alive and are fighting with the coffin sect ! And the coffin is open and inside, there is...the great Chen Hung Lieh ! Thanks to a magic flower, Cheung Ching Ching's lover is not blind anymore too and they all fight Chen Hung Lieh.

What an amazing movie !!! Perhaps there are some cut scenes or perhaps the explanations for all what is missing are given in the dialogues, but as the movie isn't English dubbed or subbed, it's difficult to know. But the fights are good, Cheung Ching Ching is great as usual, and Chen Hung Lieh is as good as usual in another villain role, so, the movie is worth to watch.

**Scorching Sun, Fierce Winds, Wild Fire (Taiwan, 1977: Sun Kam-Yun) - aka Any Which Way You Punch; Dragon Connection; Duel Under the Burning Sun** - Warlord Tung (Chui Fook Sang) has his illegal operations disturbed by a bandit queen named Violet (?!), and her gang. Little does he know however that his nemesis is none other than his own beloved do-gooder ass-kicking daughter (Angela Mao). Another source of potential problems is a mysterious martial art ace (Tien Peng) who stays in the area and who has trashed Tung's men in a brawl at the local inn. Then there are also two escaped convicts (Dorian Tan Tao-Liang, Lo Lieh) who also excel in kung fu and have come into town. Finally, last but not least is Wu, (Cheng Yi), Tung's dangerous and ruthless deputy who is having an affair with Tung's woman and is also looking for his boss's hidden treasure map - and he's not the only one searching for it. Thus is set a dangerous game where nearly everyone has a hidden agenda or a secret identity and seeks to double-cross the other. Ultimately though, there can be only one winner and dreadful consequences for the ones who lose.

While the "vengeance is mine" kind of plot is the more common of martial flicks plot, intrigue capers such as the one found in SCORCHING SUN...are also a recurring sight in martial art cinema fare, derived from a long established tradition found in martial art pulp fiction and Chinese Opera. This one is pretty entertaining as besides the being plenty of mystery, suspense, and plot twists, there is also terrific action and a stellar cast of martial art players such as feisty heroine Angela Mao, kicking ace Dorian Tan and ugly as sin regular baddie Lo Lieh all of whom not only get to kick plenty of asses but also play colourful and fun characters.

Plenty of fun can also be derived from the film's silliness too. The film indeed boasts some comedic relief bits, such as with the Lo Lieh/Dorian Tan humorous pairing or with a couple of henchmen, but there's also a fair amount of goofs such as the shameless use of the Star Wars music as the film score or the impromptu apparition of a 1972 Cadillac (the date is marked on the licence plate) in a tale supposedly set in early twenty century China. Most of the goofs however are the result of too abrupt or silly to be believed plot twists. Like most movies of its kind, the SCORCHING SUN script was probably written as the movie was being made depending on the sets or the stars immediate availability. This usually gives way to a very messy movie. Fortunately here instead of undermining it, the goofs only add to the film's quirkiness instead

Besides Angela, Dorian and Lo Lieh, SCORCHING SUN's cast is also made-up of other lesser-known but still notorious martial art players. The head villain is play by Cheng Yi who started out as a stoic swordplay hero in the late sixties but switched to playing villains around the mid-seventies. He had been paired previously with Angela in their co-lead vehicle LADY WHIRLWIND back in 1972, which was meant to make kung fu stars out of those who had done only swordplays until then. Tien Peng's path was the reverse of the one of Chang Yi as he started out playing a villain in the King Hu classic TOUCH OF ZEN but became a martial art heroic star later on in such films as the 18 BRONZEMAN. It seemed he was a popular pop singer off-screen back in the seventies, the Andy Lau of his time perhaps. He never strayed outside of Taiwan to Hong Kong though, and appears to be quite forgotten nowadays - at least by martial art cinema. One of the two main members of Violet's gang is played by the fierce looking Lung Fong who was a martial art regular who would later become the patented head villain of the late eighties/early nineties gambling movies starting out with the seminal GOD OF GAMBLERS (89).

The film English title SCORCHING SUN, FIERCE WIND, WILD FIRE is something of a bit of a mystery. It's probably the actual translated Chinese title, the colourful designate serving as name attributes for each of the main characters; but which ones, and which attributes goes to who? Angela and Tien Peng are certainly two of them but who is the third. Is it villain Cheng Yi. Only someone familiar with the Chinese language and symbolism might know.

Summing it up, overall SCORCHING SUN is a quite entertaining quirky romp full of intrigue, goofs and kung fu which when done by Angela Mao is always a strong plus. If at a technical/script polish level the film rates at 6.5, it's entertainment value is 7.

**Screaming Tiger (Taiwan, 1973: Kim Lung)** - An unusually busy plot with character connections left and right plus some re-thinking of Jimmy Wang Yu's revenge motives, muddled is the word on Kim Lung's direction. It's admirable to make more out of a genre vehicle, its straight story and to re-locate to Japan but for advancement and excellence in filmmaking within the genre, turn to other Jimmy Wang Yu vehicles such as One-Armed Swordsman, Golden Swallow and The Sword. Screaming Tiger ain't it division-wise but excels in action, providing the viewer with intense brawls with both sumo wrestlers but topping it off best with the Jimmy/Lung Fei end duel that takes place both on a moving train, in water and near a waterfall.

**Sea God and Ghosts (Taiwan, 1977: Ching Sheng-En, Chung Fuk-Man)** - During a stormy weather, a dragon prince flies from the sea and arrives on earth, where he is impersonated by a young man, who meets Chia Ling. Chia Ling fights with two men and they give her a pearl, but when she is in an inn, the pearl is stolen by Wei Ping Ao. When she tries to recover the pearl, she makes a deal with Kao Fei and his men and, helped by a young scholar, she goes to look for the pearl.

Later, she learns that her friend is the dragon prince and they fight with evil monsters and even with her own master, who is an accomplice of Kao Fei and Wei Ping Ao. Finally, the dragon and Chia Ling succeed in their mission and the prince returns in the sea. That's a good movie for Chia Ling's presence ; all her fights are great in this one and it's worth watching at least for them.

**Seaman No. 7 (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Wei)** - aka **Wang Yu's 7 Magnificent Fights** - This Lo Wei/Jimmy Wang Yu effort does no service overall to the former's reputation as a boring director and the latter as a kickass star but bright spots do crop up. Brightest being James Tien with blonde hair and pink pants! Before we get to that, Wang Yu is the titular seaman fleeing to Japan (a country he he dislikes) after killing somebody. Getting slightly involved with smugglers but also trying to make a living as a waiter, taking Judo classes and sightseeing, eventually there's dark turns involving bloody murder so on to pieces of classic celluloid involving Wang Yu fighting underwater, hanging onto trucks while smoking and taking on the badass James Tien (who never had a more inspiring character design in films) plus sumo wrestling henchmen. HUGE stretches and reels of boredom and uninspired fight choreography take center stage and Lo Wei seems more interested in sightseeing in Japan through the lens. Eventually all crap that doesn't matter (including murder because by the end, characters are pretty upbeat) gets pushed aside in favour of the sparse moments that do work and fun, mainly involving Wang Yu on the truck versus Lam Ching-Ying and mentioned finale.

**Secret Executioners (South Korea, 1982)** - A prime slice of Filmark International B-movie martial arts action. Hwang Jang Lee and his gang are out to make as much money as they can. Out to get them is a lone cop and an array of other gangsters and con artists. You cant describe the plot details too well as its another cut and paste job from maverick director Godfrey Ho. They have inserted some funny scenes featuring foreigners to help sell the film to other markets. We get treated to the skills of actor Jim Norris. One of the worst film fighters to ever grace a cinema screen. I'm not really sure you can call him an actor either. The guy performs the funniest Snake Fist technique Ive ever seen on film.

Secret Executioners is far from the wildest or most entertaining Godfrey Ho/Tomas Tang production. However the presence of one Hwang Jang Lee does help the film a lot. The credit sequence claims Hwang was the films fight choreographer. I'm not sure how true this actually is?. 90% of the action is in the style of the early 70's basher's, featuring the swinging arm and leg techniques. This style was very out dated by 1982 and I'm not sure Hwang Jang Lee staged these fight scenes?. There are some stand out action scenes that he may have staged. A scene where HJL has a fight in a sauna changing room is very impressive. This fight is more like style of choreography seen in other 80s films of the time. The scene where he fights the cop in the abandoned building is also a standout moment. Being a Godfrey Ho film there's also some very random moments thrown into the mix. Including a Korean fighter who oozes milk from his mouth when he gets hit. If you don't have high expectations & your fan of HJL then you'll enjoy watching this film.

**Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger (South Korea, 1982)** - I've been on a bit of an old-school Korean kung-fu movie marathon lately, having also checked out 'Champ Against Champ' (reviewed in post #966 back on page 97) and 'Strike of Thunderkick Tiger' in recent months. The one thing that all of these movies have in common is that it's sadly impossible to see them in their original language and soundtrack, with almost all of them being purchased for international distribution by Godfrey Ho and his Asso Asia Productions, then re-dubbed into whatever he saw fit and sold off for cheap to the international market.

'Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger' is certainly no different, originally entitled 'Injamun Salsu', it's been suggested that the movie was originally filmed in 1980, which would put it 2 years ahead of 'Ninja in the Dragons Den', a production which it clearly has a lot in common with. Most likely this information is incorrect though, and it makes much more sense that NITDD was made prior to this, with SNRT being a cash-in for the local Korean audience. (It's worth noting 'Ninja in the Dragons Den' was also re-cut and had new scenes filmed for Korea, which was re-titled 'Black Dragon's Last Warning')

So instead of Conan Lee and Hiroyuki Sanada, here we get Dragon Lee and Jack Lam. What does remain the same is the presence of Hwang Jang Lee as the villain. To describe the plot of 'Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger' would be a fruitless exercise. Something about 2 sisters and one of them doesn't know she has a sister and she's stuck in Tiger Castle under the control of Hwang Jang Lee and his band of ninjas. Basically, Dragon Lee, Jack Lam, and the other sister decide to rescue her.

The dubbing is hilarious, the fight scenes range from sloppy, to absurd (one tournament scene has a fighter trying to defeat the other by tickling him, all accompanied by truly irritating sound effects), to actually pretty damn good. When Lee and Lam unleash their kicks, a certain energy is brought to proceedings, and the way every fighter strikes a pose before charging into combat somehow never gets old. Hwang Jang Lee, as in so many of his movies, doesn't get much to do fight wise until the end, however after revealing that his weakness is the naked female body, at one point he's randomly given a sex scene. Not only is it bizarre that Hwang Jang Lee is in a sex scene, but there's also the fact that in the context of the story he shouldn't even be able to get near a woman!

Making sense is not the order of the day here, and in place of cohesive storytelling we have Dragon Lee fighting cross-dressers, bulked up muscle-men, and of course, Hwang Jang Lee himself. In all fairness Jack Lam gets in on a lot of the action as well, with many of the fights being double teams with himself and Lee (just like Conan and Sanada in NITDD!). By the end, having watched Hwang meeting his bewildering demise (a mix of topless breast flashing, nonsensical cartwheeling all over a courtyard, and what looks like a yoga move gone wrong), I realised I'd actually been pretty entertained. It may not be what it was intended to be, but as it is, you can do a lot worse than 'Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger'.

**Secret Of Chinese Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1977: Sung Ting-Mei)** - Newly arrived kung fu fighter (Sze Ma-Lung) takes on evil foremen and ruthless big boss (Lo Lieh) in this low budget, outside set Taiwanese kung-fu movie. Echoes of The Big Boss are present but barely standard story telling, not as much of a compelling hero and largely weak action makes it one for the bottom of the bin only. Having Blackie Ko and Lung Fei present brings some power to the martial arts but the flat outdoor locations fail to make even compelling concepts like action choreography in the mud stand out. Hard to believe the director of The Deadly Silver Spear made this.

**Secret of Shaolin Poles (Taiwan, 1977: Ulysses Au)** - aka: **Prodigal Boxer 2; New Prodigal Boxer 2; The Story of Fong Sai Yuk** - In 1977, Lau Kar-Leung teamed up with Taiwanese director Ulysses Au once more for another independent flick, this time with a lot more success than the blandly forgettable Ming Patriots. The cards were stacked more in their favor this time: this project seemed to have way more of a budget than their previous collaboration had and, consequently, a (relatively) longer shooting schedule (Ming Patriots looks to have been choreographed by Lau over the weekend while he was visiting relatives in Hong Kong). Moreover, the story, which involves Chinese folk hero Fong Sai-Yuk, hit closer to home for Lau, considering that Fong Sai-Yuk was a student of the hung gar style, the same style that Lau Kar-Leung had trained in. Furthermore, Lau had already worked on two Fong Sai-Yuk movies around that time: The Men from the Monastery and Heroes Two, so he probably had a deeper connection with the story.

Finally, Lau Kar-Leung had already worked with most of the cast by this point. After all, one of the principal actors was his own brother (a veteran choreographer by this point, too), so there was no trouble there in knowing how to choreograph him. Lau had worked with Meng Fei on the landmark hit Five Shaolin Masters, so he was probably well

aware of the actors' strong and weak points. Chang Yi had stolen the show in *Ming Patriots*, so there was little chance of him screwing this film up. It must make a big difference to an action director when you're intimately familiar with the actors you're working with.

*The Secret of Shaolin Poles* is the first official sequel to the 1972 classic *The Prodigal Boxer*, a film that bore the distinction of being the first modern kung fu movie about folk hero Fong Sai Yuk. Fong Sai-Yuk would show up in numerous films afterward, being played by the likes of Alexander Fu Sheng, Chin Kar-Lok, and even some fellow named Jet Li. Meng Fei was the first, however. Meng had reprised the role in 1975 in *Young Hero of Shaolin*, which shares a lot of similarities between this film's cast and crew. This movie however, addresses a number of plot points from *The Prodigal Boxer*, including its main villain (Yasuaki Kurata of *Fist of Legend*), who's supposed to be the brother of the villain from the first film (also played by Kurata).

The movie begins with a pair of anti-Qing rebels being presented before Commander Ma (Challenge of Death's Chang Yi). In a moment characteristic of a Lau-choreographed film, Ma commands them to kneel, but their horse posture is so strong that Ma's soldiers are unable to force them to do so. Only through the manipulation of pressure points are they able to force the two guys to kneel, after which Ma kills them. We then get a few random fight scenes, including one of a guy who looks and dresses like Fong Sai-Yuk (Lau Kar-Wing, of *Kung Pao: Enter the Fist*) who beats up a bunch of soldiers with just his fan. At about the same time, Commander Ma receives news that Dragon Lee, brother of the Tiger Lee villain character from the first movie, wishes to challenge Fong Sai-Yuk to a duel atop some poles and wants Ma to pay him a reward if he wins. Commander Ma agrees, thus setting up a match-made-in-hell partnership between the Japanese fighter and the Qing official.

We then follow Fong Sai-Yuk (Meng Fei) as he makes his way to a village to visit his friends. There are two things wrong with that, however. First, there are quite a few assassins ready to kill him on the way, including a man dressed as an old woman and blind man armed with a garotte. Second, when he arrives, Fong finds out from Xiao Yu (Doris Lung, who had worked with Lau in *Master of the Flying Guillotine*, the local girl who wants to get into Fong's pants, that his friend were those two guys who were killed in the first scene. She informs him that an impostor--the guy we saw fight the soldiers--had secured the men's heads after the execution. Fong and Xiao Yu head for the local brothel in order to find out who the impostor is.

While hanging out at the whorehouse, Fong gets in a big kung fu fight with the fake Fong Sai-Yuk, who turns out to be a man named Fong Tin. Fong Tin receives an important hung gar lesson from Sai-Yuk, who beats him up and taunts him about the weakness of his technique at every turn. While leaving the brothel, Fong Sai-Yuk makes eye contact with a pretty prostitute (Joh Yim-Yung, who had been in *Ming Patriots*) and is rebuked by Dragon Lee, who tells him to stop looking at his woman.

There's a "touching" scene in which Fong Sai-Yuk, Fong Tin, and Xiao Yu go to a restaurant where a small shrine has been erected in honor of Fong's friends. We learn that Fong Tin had secured the heads of the men, found their bodies, and then sewed the heads back on and buried them so that they could have a peaceful afterlife. Huh. Anyway, the two Fongs become friends.

Commander Ma and Dragon Lee meet up at the site where the pole duel is supposed to take place. The latter makes a public announcement that he intends to duel with Fong Sai-Yuk. While that hardly seems worth mentioning, I have to point out that he does so while simultaneously physically abusing the prostitute from the earlier scene, whom he had bought from the brothel. When Fong Tin hears that a cocky Japanese fighter is challenging Fong and mistreating Chinese women, he goes to challenge the man himself. He soon finds himself on the wrong end of a sharpened bamboo stake at the bottom of the poles. Fong Sai-Yuk eventually arrives and fights Dragon Lee, but the poles atop which they're fighting are booby trapped and Fong is seriously injured. Only some quick thinking from Xiao Yu, the prostitute, and an almost-but-not-quite-dead Fong Tin save Fong Sai-Yuk's life.

Fong Sai-Yuk is nursed back to health by the prostitute, Xiao Yu, and Fong's own mother (Kong Ching-Ha, of *My Blade, My Life*). Xiao Yu's father tries to turn in Fong for the reward money, but the heroes fake Fong's death in order to get him out of harm's way. Fong ends up going into training with a crippled fighter named Ma Chiu (Superkicker Dorian Tan Tao-Liang), while Dragon Lee goes on a warpath, arresting the women in Fong's life and trying to rape them. Unlike Anderson Silva, Fong's more than ready for a rematch.

The quality of Lau Kar-Leung's choreography here is a lot closer to what he was doing for the Shaw Brothers in 1977 for films like *The Deadly Mantis* and *Executioners of Shaolin*. The moves are quicker and crisper and the hung gar techniques are more prevalent, even though Meng Fei spends much of the movie fighting with a fan. There's less overt hung gar philosophy here than in Lau's own directorial efforts, but one can see it in some of the training sequences and in the fight between the two Fongs. The neat part of the training sequence is how much Lau emphasizes solid footwork, despite hung gar being known mainly for his animal-based hand techniques.

In a burst of creativity from Lau not seen since *Master of the Flying Guillotine*, the standard-issue Fong Sai-Yuk pole fight is given a breath of fresh air via the numerous traps hidden inside the poles. Apparently, Fong Sai-Yuk really did fight atop a series of poles, knocking his opponent off and winning it. This film adds to the legend by including exploding poles, descending poles, poles that split into two when someone steps on them, and sharpened bamboo that rises from the ground at certain intervals. It's nice touch and works well for the movie here.

The actors acquit themselves fairly well to the material here. Meng Fei is good as the cocky, but likable Fong Sai-Yuk, and his fighting is a lot more assured under Lau Kar-Leung's direction than it ever was under Lau's brother (who choreographed many of Meng's movies). His handiwork with the fan predates Jackie Chan's famous fan fight in *The Young Master*. Yasuaki Kurata and Chang Yi are solid as always, with the latter essentially reprising his role from *Ming Patriots*. Doris Lung, who looked great under Lau's direction before, is relegated to a flower vase role as a girl involved in a sort-of love triangle between her, Fong, and the prostitute. Even worse is Tan Tao-Liang, one of the great genre superkickers, who is forced to play the role of the master, with minimal fight action. A brief exchange between him and Kurata shows that he might've shined more than ever before under Lau's direction, as his career was hampered by one too many cheap Taiwanese films with choreographers who didn't know how to tune into his skills. Alas, that wasn't to be.

The main flaws to this film fall mainly on the shoulders of the writers and Ulysses Au, who fill the film with racist jabs at the Japanese and violence against women. Things get particularly ugly in the last act when Kurata's character tries to rape Doris Lung and then beats the prostitute to death. He then outlines his plan to Chang Yi, in which he plans to rape Doris atop the poles unless Fong Sai-Yuk shows up to fight him again. The rampant misogyny never adds up to anything more than the filmmakers trying to make the Japanese character as hateful as possible.

I almost wonder if it was Lau's experience on this film that inspired him to make *Heroes of the East*, which treated Yasuaki Kurata and Japanese martial arts in general with respect for once. You can just imagine Lau listening to Kurata's complaints about the character he's portraying and then rubbing his chin and planning out a film that would remedy that, occasionally exchanging ideas with Kurata in order to develop said idea. It certainly gives this movie another dimension of sorts in how it helped spur the creation of one of the greatest kung fu movies of all time.

**Secret Rivals (Hong Kong, 1976: Ng See-Yuen)** - SECRET RIVALS is the film that back in 1976 truly launched three bright stars of independent kung fu cinema, (two of them the genre's greatest kickers) Don Wong, John Liu and bootmaster supreme Hwang Jang Lee. It also established the highly successful gimmick of having two heroes with different fighting styles unite to fight an invincible adversary. The movie however does not have a very auspicious beginning as it has very much the look and feel of one of those dreadful seventies lame kung-fu schlock films with very rough filmmaking, cheap production values and absolutely horrid dubbing. As one of film's first scenes is of a bad guy bullying a whiny little kid, a prospective viewer may get a very poor first impression of the film. The advice however is to stick around.

Somewhere in Korea, a local lord, of Chinese origin, has organised a martial competition in order to select a new chief bodyguard. Among the dozens of candidates there's Sheng Ying-fei (Don Wong Tao) who's a Southern style exponent and Shao Yi-fei (John Liu) a master kicker, who find themselves to be in each others way and develop an enmity for one another. The local lord's actual aim in getting a new bodyguard is to have him carry out an assassination and then get rid of him easily. What he doesn't know though is that both Sheng and Shao have secret agendas of their own but the tense rivalry between the two could now jeopardise each of their respective plans, whatever they might be. Then there's also the Silver Fox (Hwang Jang Lee) to deal with, the local lord's partner in crime, who's a lethal martial master.

Besides the recurrent whiny kid, SECRET RIVALS also soon introduces the unexpected appearance of an oafish Western brute, the "Russian World champion" who has come it would seem all the way to Korea to participate in the contest and makes an absolute boorish ass of himself in the process. Sigh. Thankfully he's gone after ten minutes. Thus despite some bothersome sightings overall, the film holds together pretty well thanks to it's two lead stars genial charisma, the clouded intrigues surrounding their real intentions and the dramatic tension that develops over their "secret rivalry" which keeps the viewers on their toes. Then of course there are the fights that are terrific, with Wong being a superbly fast and crisp fighter and Liu quite spectacular with his kicks and flexibility. The film's best scene is the pair of them doing warm-up exercises before a friendly bout together, (a scene obviously borrowed from Bruce Lee's *WAY OF THE DRAGON*) which allows them to display their superb and sharp physicality. Hwang Jang Lee only shows-up in the second half, he looks a bit silly with his fake wig and beard but he too is great to watch.

SECRET RIVALS is the work of Ng See-Yuen, who was in the seventies H-K cinema's first and foremost maverick independent martial art maker, deemed by local film scholars as one of the most resourceful and innovative directors of the period. He also had a knack at finding promising talent and picking up on popular trends; sort of the Chinese Roger Corman of his time. Of course much of his innovations are now lost on contemporary viewers because of the age of the films but at the time they really rocked. Thus Ng pioneered the use of real martial artists instead of trained actors or stuntmen and while his film direction itself was rather rough he nonetheless developed some cinematic techniques including slow motion and zoom lenses to make his fight scenes more crisp and forceful than any one else's. In the early seventies, after directing a string of gritty k-f pot-boilers as the initial trend toward k-f movies abated following Bruce Lee's death, Ng turned towards crime-action thrillers meeting great popular and critical success. Then in 1976, as the martial art genre was starting to emerge out of its creative and popular slump, he went back to it with a couple of catchy gimmicks as well as a trio of performers of great talent but who all had a disappointing false start in their film careers. These were Don Wong whose mop-head hairdo and feline screen presence was more than evocative of Bruce Lee, John Liu a pupil of already established martial art-star Tang Tao Liang and Hwang Jang Lee a Korean Taekwondo exponent of powerful and spectacular kicking skills.

Ng See Yuen's big gimmick for SECRET RIVALS was of course to pair two fighters together with each of them using a vastly different martial style. One is a Southern stylist (Don Wong) using mostly hand techniques and low kicks while the other was a spectacular Northern kicker (John Liu) thus leading to an eclectic kung-fu spectacle and hence to the film's original Chinese title: SOUTHERN FIST NORTHERN KICK. Still while it did not diminish Don Wong's involvement in the action in any way, with his two other co-stars being leg fighters, the film was made into a real kick fest. That must have been a most invigorating showcase at the time. Big kicks had seen great days in the early seventies to mid-seventies (in particular with Bruce Lee who introduced showy Taekwondo kicks into kung-fu cinema and the Angela Mao movies choreographed by Sammo Hung), but with the coming of Shaolin k-f in 1974 that favoured mostly hands techniques and low-kicks, high spectacular kicks had thus been in retreat for a time. Until RIVALS brought back the move with a bang, thanks to the great skills of his new performers, the cinematic techniques developed by Ng See Yuen and the action choreography by Peking Opera trainees Ga, Ming (better known under his English name Tommy Lee) and Chan Chuan, who designed the action as a ferocious in your face ballet of death. Since they were at the beginning of their film careers neither John Liu or Hwang had yet developed their bag of tricks such as Liu holding his leg up in the air with his hand, although he was already crushing jars in his training scene - a move he would repeat ad nauseum for nearly all of his movies.

Ng See-yuen's other major idea for his movie was to develop a rivalry between his two heroes thus creating a network of dramatic tension and intrigue that would grip the viewer. A lethal feud between a Northern and Southern master or school is actually one of the favourite plot devices found in martial literary art or cinematic fiction and there's at least a dozen Shaolin movies where the heroes have to fight a master of the Eagle Claws, the Mantis Fist or Wu-Tang, all Northern related styles. In SECRET RIVALS however the tangible friction is between what looks to be the film's two heroes. Something that this reviewer would very much like to know though is if in the movie's original Mandarin dub whether Wong and Liu's characters had a distinct accent that would have indicated a peculiar regional background. As this reviewer understands it, for a variety of social/cultural reasons, in China, Northern and Southern folks often don't quite see each other eye to eye. It was an uneasy relationship that for a time was especially exacerbated in the southern city of Hong Kong which for decades served as a safe-haven for millions of Chinese, a good deal of them Northern refugees fleeing either the Japanese invasion, the civil war of the thirties as well as the Communists take over of the Mainland with a result that Hong Kong became an over-crowded urban refugee camp. Ng See-Yuen must have been keenly aware of the Northern/Southern divide as he was born in Shanghai but from Cantonese (meaning Southern) parents and was both raised and educated in Shanghai then Hong-Kong. Small wonder then that he would eventually come-up with this tale whose real inner drama rested on the fierce rivalry, uneasy relationship and grudging respect between a Northern and Southern fighter.

SECRET RIVALS was shot in Korea which was a popular shooting location from the early seventies on for low budget k-f film production companies because of the country's low cost environment, beautiful pastoral scenery and its many unspoiled temples that were used as sets. Usually though Korea merely doubled for an ancient China setting. Here for once though the story is truly set in Korea and the film makes great use of the local scenery, including a giant Buddha statue and a couple of huge temple courtyards - one in bricks and the other arranged in terraces. This creates a look so exotic and elegant that it very quickly transcends the cheap look the film seems to have at first and even gives it a touch of class, one that would actually be hard pressed to find in more elaborate but more tacky looking movie sets such as found in most seventies k-f film productions, even the ones by the Shaw Brothers studio.

SECRET RIVALS was a huge hit across Southeast Asia and helped revitalise martial art cinema in the second half of the seventies thanks to its newly established stars and of course the fighting pair gimmick which became almost instantly a standard within the genre. Up to three or four dozen of such similarly themed movies thus appeared over the following years, the bulk of it independent productions starring besides Liu and Wong the likes of Tang Tao Liang, Chi Kwan Chun and several others. Fight arranger Tommy Lee went on to choreograph a good many of these productions while also frequently playing outlandish super k-f villain before becoming a k-f director in his own right.



None of these players however ever quite reached the cult popularity of Hwang Jang Lee whose film career went higher and lasted a bit longer than anyone else playing mostly superbly mean and cool bad-ass villains. In fact, his cult fame was so great that when the video distribution company Xenon released their version of RIVALS the title of the film was changed to the awkward and absurd "SILVER FOX RIVALS" based on the name of Hwang's character in the movie's English dubbed version (the character's original Chinese name though was "Bloody Fox"). For the most part Hwang worked for Ng See Yuen to whom he was his ace in the hole.

SECRETS RIVALS huge success served Ng See-yuen quite well as it firmly established his newly found film company Seasonal on solid ground and after having two more hits starring John Liu and Hwang Jang Lee SECRET RIVALS II and INVINCIBLE ARMOUR he started a producing career. Over the years he discovered and promoted promising new acting or directorial talents such as Corey Yuen, Conan Lee, Tsui Hark and of course Yuen Woo Ping and Jackie Chan - producing for them a groundbreaking pair of k-f comedies SNAKE IN THE EAGLE SHADOW and DRUNKEN MASTER (both 78). But that's another story.

So summing it up - despite it's age, its wretched dubbing, its horrid gweilos and whiny kid sightings all of these turned out as only momentary distractions. Overall SECRET RIVALS remains quite appealing on the basis of its action, its stars and its intrigue not to mention it is historically relevant and therefore is a quite recommended find.

**Secret Rivals 2 (Hong Kong, 1977: Ng See-Yuen) – aka Silver Fox Rivals 2** - In his endeavour to make the film as thrilling and action-packed as the original, he's aided by his fellow kicking machine John Liu and newcomer Tino Wong. Yuen Woo-ping orchestrates events from behind the camera, whilst overseen by director Ng See Yuen.

The film is slightly – and only slightly – less engaging than the original due to the absence of one of the original's leading man Tao Wong, but it's ultimately a minor nit-pick for a film that is otherwise on par with its predecessor.

Returning to the role of leading man Hsiao Yu-fei is Tan Tao-liang's protégé John Liu. As with the original, he's ever the unassuming grinner with both arms folded across his chest, studying every fighter in his vicinity for potential weaknesses, until the time comes for him to spring into action, at which point he might as well be perpetually perched on one leg with the other several feet above his own head.

While he represents the kicking equation of the film's two protagonists, Tino Wong assumes the role of the Southern boxer Shen Ying-wu, brother of Yu-fei's brother in arms from the previous film, Shen Ying-wei. Returning to assume villainous duties is Korea's most notorious cinematic head-punter Hwang Jang-lee, this time portraying the deceased Silver Fox's twin brother, Gold Fox and as with the original film, "Secret Rivals 2" has its villain directly in the spotlight.

The film opens with a recap of the final battle between Hsiao Yu-fei, Shen Ying-wei, and Silver Fox at the conclusion of "The Secret Rivals". Silver Fox is ultimately defeated and killed, and news of his demise reaches his identical twin brother, Gold Fox, who vows to avenge his brother's death along with retrieving the shipment of stolen silver he'd hidden before his death. Gold Fox summons his old rival Hsing Yih to ascertain the combat styles of his brother's killers. Hsing Yih determines that the combined skill of Yu-fei and Ying-wei will be too great for Gold Fox to overcome. Hsing Yih offers to help bring both men down in exchange for being wed to Gold Fox's daughter, which Gold Fox accepts.

With Ying-wei having been re-stationed to a new post, Gold Fox selects a new target in the form of Ying-wei's brother Shen Ying-wu, while keeping his focus upon the 8 diagrams pendant taken from Silver Fox after his death which reveals the stolen silver's location.

Despite Tao Wong being AWOL, "Secret Rivals 2" is just as action-packed and exhilarating as its predecessor. The film's action directing duties fall into the then-up and coming hands of Yuen Woo-ping and he displays the same level of mastery over staging and filming screen combat as he would decades later as a veteran action filmmaker.

If it is a slightly lesser film than the original, it is only because the highly versatile and charismatic Tao Wong doesn't appear. And while Tino Wong is certainly up to the task of filling the void as the Southern Boxing half of the Fist and Foot duo, the impression Tao Wong made in the first film is ultimately too great for his absence in the sequel to go unnoticed.

Nevertheless, the film stands on its own well, and just as its predecessor, belongs on the highlight reel of superkicker Hwang Jang-lee.

He was truly on a roll in the late seventies, with his appearances in "The Secret Rivals" films and Jackie Chan's

"Snake in the Eagle's Shadow" and "Drunken Master" cementing his reign as the supreme kicking machine of Hong Kong cinema and "Secret Rivals 2" is worth seeing for him alone, with the additional incentive that he's in a far greater percentage of the film this time.

Where the action differs in the sequel is the greater emphasis on weapons-usage, specifically Gold Fox's skills with a set of spinning ring blades resembling a pair of oversized Emei daggers with built in brass knuckles. Gold Fox's skill with the weapons proves so formidable that Yu-fei and Ying-wu have to devote just as much attention to countering these as they do to his kicking skills, and it's a powerful reminder that the general public's perception of martial arts consisting purely of unarmed combat is far from true. Still, the kicking skills of John Liu and Hwang Jang-lee take precedent in the action, and it is truly a delight for both diehard fans of the genre and newcomers to old school martial arts, who are likely to be just as blown away by how long each shot lasts before the camera cuts in the fight scenes as they are with the dynamism and dexterity of the three leading men.

"Secret Rivals 2" is a worthy successor to the original and one that's stuffed the same amount of continuous action as the first. With his return to villainous duties, Hwang Jang-lee solidifies himself as one of the quintessential villains in martial arts cinema history. Indeed, the ease with which his evildoing warrior steals the show in both this film and the original is something that has seldom been equalled to this degree in martial arts films of later years. Wah Sing-Ku in "Lethal Weapon 4", Yuri Boyka in "Undisputed 2" and Mad Dog in "The Raid: Redemption" spring to mind, along with just about anything else with Hwang Jang-lee's name attached to it. It may not be a "root-for-the-bad-guy" type of film, but it's certainly hard to argue that he isn't everyone's favourite character!

**Secret Rivals 3 (Taiwan, 1981: Cheung San-Yee) - aka Northern Kicks, Southern Fists; New South Hand and North Kick Blows** - North Leg (John Lui) finds his brothers been murdered with the knife of Southern Fist expert played by Alexander Lo Rei. North Leg holds Southern Fist responsible and wants revenge until the two find out that there is someone playing them against each other so he can control the town and get rid of the best fighters.

I got it on the cheap and I'm a fan of Alexander Lo Rei, and John Lui never disappoints with his great kicking skills. It could easily of been just another independent kung fu film had it not been for the star quality and the excellent action choreography by the legendary Robert Tai who is the main bad guy and has a great fight scene at the end. I think that Chin Ling gets annoying and is in it too much, and takes away the films star quality as every minute he's in it trying to be funny, however he is a great acrobat and is obviously talented at martial arts and I think if he'd played a more serious character would of really added to the film.

Chin Ling, every scene he's in tries to make the audience laugh, I think in small doses it's good but he gets very annoying after a while.

Really good, it's Robert Tai so you know it's going to be very good, John Lui kicks the crap out of everyone, I think Alexander Lo Rei is good, but should of been allowed to kick more as he is a taekwondo champion! The ending fight where Lo Rei and John Lui fight is incredible as Robert Tai shows off great acrobatics and John Lui fires off kicks in all directions and Lo Rei even shows some devastating low kicks a lot like the kicks of a dog boxer.

Quite a bit I was surprised, stabbings and the usual blood out the mouth.

Robert Tai, Alexander Lo Rei and John Lui really save this film and really put everything into it. I'd say buy but Chin Ling is annoying but it's a good film and the end fight will have you watching it again and again.

**Secret Service of the Imperial Court (Hong Kong, 1984: Tony Liu)** - Emperor is more interested of fooling around with girls than national matters and leaves his trusted one Wang The Eunuch handle lesser things. Leung Kar Yan plays sergeant of imperial guards who refuses to slay righteous officials and is forced to escape with his wife and child. Hunt is on...

Excellent flick by master director Lu Chin Ku which is just barely weaker than *Bastard Swordsman* or *Lady Assassins*. What movie misses is great 1 to 1 fight but there is lot swordplay action to enjoy. All cranked up of course. Lots of familiar names in cast, Beardy delivers terrific display of his acting talents..

On side note, Liu Yung who plays eunuch was without doubt ladies man but I have always thought him as bit gayish but never knew why. At last found out, this was 1st time when viewed SSOIC but I realized had seen part of it many years ago from grainy vhs. Did not know who Liu Yung was then but image of him speaking with thin voice, lipstick and nail polish somehow remained in back of my head but could not place it until now.

**Secret Shaolin Kung-Fu, The (Taiwan, 1979: Ko Pao)** - When kung-fu comedy broke primarily through Jackie Chan movies like Snake In The Eagle's Shadow, everybody wanted a piece of the pie. But there's a difference critically between those who tried to further established conventions and those who merely copied the exact same formula. It's the category The Secret Shaolin Kung-Fu sorts itself into. Stealing HEAVILY the same plot and scenes from said Jackie Chan classic, everything's just lacking in fun, sincerity and a compelling lead. Lee I-Min is talented physically and lots of that is on display but no action aside from some intricacy towards the end registers as there's no driving force here to make a selling element like action leap off the screen even ever so slightly. Therefore overlong, annoying and in no way wanting to be rescued from being looked at as shamelessly trying to fit in, The Secret Shaolin Kung-Fu ALMOST is fascinating from a market perspective but only for a minute.

**7 Commandments Of Kung Fu, The (Taiwan, 1979: Got Si-Ho)** - Reportedly borrowing a few beats from the Lee Van Cleef Western Day Of Anger, despite The 7 Commandments Of Kung Fu comes off as channeling the kung-fu comedy formula it's trying to cash in heavily in. It's tired, despite a terrific hand of action-cards. Lee I Min plays a drug store clerk who gets in the middle of badasses duking it out (Lung Fei among others and the main one in white played Chang Yi). He strikes up a friendship with the latter, learns the tricks of the trade but the two will ultimately square off as opponents the more the boy learns of his master's killing ways...

The way too long credits sequence involving hoops and large mantis puppets showcases we have a terrific lead in Lee I-Min when it comes to the physical stuff but a wimpy, annoying AND physical appearance won't light the screen on fire. Nor will excessive laxative jokes but the action, that comes at us in a more steady stream as the movie progresses, is terrific. Chang Yi's danger factor adds to the fights that rarely go into the direction of full comedy and bringing in said hoops and training involving mantises made out of hay does become an image you take away from the film.

**7 Finger Kung Fu (South Korea, 1981: Nam Gi-nam)** - The film begins with Casanova Wong undergoing some rather painful looking physical training under the guidance of his white haired master. While he grimaces and grunts, Ca Sa Fa remembers back to how his father was killed by rival martial artists who also left the youngster short of a few fingers (hence the title). This flashback then provides the motivation for Casanova's rage and he seeks revenge on those that wronged him all those years ago (or that what I think is happening - the version I watched had no subtitles and was in Korean).

When he does catch up with the villains, Ca Sa Fa becomes a blur of fists and feet accompanied by some rather funky seventies music. Casanova's kicks have never looked so devastating as in this film (in my opinion). Granted there may be some undercranking here and there but this doesn't detract from the level of skill on display. Not being able to understand Korean it's a little unfair to comment on the plot but it didn't seem all that complicated and the acting is typical kung fu movie fare. Great action though.

**7 Grandmasters (Taiwan, 1978: Joseph Kuo)** - Remarkable for the amount of kung-fu action contained within. Mark's review pretty much nailed on the head with his description of a no-filler kind of action movie. My first introduction to Lee Yi Min and my second Joseph Kuo Taiwanese martial arts film.

Jack Long plays the master who is seeking to confirm his status as a grandmaster of the province by fighting seven other masters in a mostly congenial travelling tournament. Jack Long is just a supremely masterful martial artist and athlete; his combination of kung fu and agility is deceptively smooth and polished. I just enjoyed watching him on the screen as he fought. I am definitely paying more attention to his other films from this point!

Jack Long brings his students and daughter, Mark Long being the eldest and most memorable. Lee Yi Min is introduced as a young man seeking to avenge his father's death; after seeing Jack Long handily defeat one of the masters, Lee Yi Min's character begs the master to take him as a student. The funny dichotomy of this movie is that while the master Sang is portrayed as honorable and good (or is he...?) the students are generally rude, abusive, and short-tempered with Lee Yi Min and his constant attempts to become a student. I found it odd that such a reputable master would have students like that but I suppose Joseph Kuo felt the movie needed some tension to make it believable.

In the end, secrets are revealed and Lee Yi Min has become a masterful apprentice, capable of taking on his own master. I'll stop there for those who haven't seen this movie yet. It's a decent if typical revenge plot that coincides with the travelling tournament angle well enough. The main focus of this movie are the fights and they are set up very well. The intensity and frequency of action is high and I would find it hard to believe that any true kung fu fan would not immensely enjoy this movie. Lee Yi Min is quite good as the upstart student, and the several grandmasters have distinctive styles but perhaps the most distinctive is Corey Yuen as the weapons master, whose fight with Jack Long is **intense**. That fight had me very impressed with both combatants and the AC.

*7 Grandmasters* is like a big slab of T-bone steak: nothin' fancy dressing it up but purely top notch action that can satisfy the biggest appetite! Its minor flaws are overshadowed by the talent in front of and behind the camera.

**7-Man Army (Hong Kong, 1976: Chang Cheh)** - Seven Man Army is a historical war fiction based on the defense of the Great Wall at Pa Tou Lou Tzu during the Second Sino-Japanese War. After a great battle, seven brave soldiers are able to take the strategic fort and were able to trick the invaders into believing thousands of men were inside. The heroes along with a boy were able to hold the fort for five days before being killed by the Japanese.

I typically don't like war movies but I did enjoy this one enough to purchase the film on DVD. I would definitely call this movie more of a drama than action film but what little action there is in the film is good action. The action is very realistic and helps the viewer quickly believe the story is possible. My favorite action sequences involve Leung Kar Yan, Wang Lung-Wei and Gordon Liu Chia-Hui as Mongol mercenaries who are the first wave of invaders who fight our heroes.

My favorite scenes of the film are the interesting stories of each of the brave men that provide a glimpse into their personal lives and what drove them to become soldiers. Ti Lung and Pai Ying were military men from the beginning. David Chiang was an abusive no good husband trying to change his life. Chi Kuan Chun and Fu Sheng had loved ones that were killed by the Japanese. Li Yi Min stood up to the Japs and Chen Kuan Tai was a guerrilla leader turned soldier. These stories help develop the characters and give us a reason to root for them. These stories draw us into the film as each is placed at a specific point. The stories also help each soldier get to know each other and their motivation which helps build a trusting bond between the 7 men. These stories also provide good action sequences. At the end of the movie, I was honored to know each of them.

**Seven Men Of Kung-Fu (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung Hang)** – **7 Knights, 8 Banners** - Chien (Cheung Fook-Gin) travels around the land to round up enough Ming heroes to tackle the Ching threat number one, premier constable Tso (Chang Yi). The likes of Chen Sing's and Phillip Ko's characters also join the fight. There's also creepy flashbacks to a wandering woman and a corpse or alive papier mache doll prepared for funeral. The deeper facets of this story doesn't come through so concentrate on the basics and you'll get the joyous, basic experience of a neat cast gathered up, a badass, red haired Chang Yi (with a killer bird) and a worthwhile gloomy experience. It's an experiment in something slightly different for a kung-fu movie but it also should be stripped down to its basics because it doesn't mean more than that.

**7 Star Grand Mantis (South Korea, 1983: Kim Seon-Gyeong)** - **aka Gay Woman from Shantung** - This Korean production was the final installment in director Kim Seon-gyeong's (*Magnificent Wonderman from Shaolin*) loosely related Shantung Trilogy. The first two installments consisted of *Incredible Shaolin Thunderkick* (aka *Water Retailer of Shantung*) and *Shantung Chinese Restaurant*, both from 1982. All the movies feature the same principal cast, headlined by Benny Tsui and Eagle Han (who also takes on action choreographer duties on all three), and are what could be called broad kung-fu comedies.

In popular opinion *7 Star Grand Mantis* seems to be regarded as the weakest of the three, and despite having personally not seen the previous two, having recently got through giving it a watch it becomes easy to see why. Benny Tsui plays a blabbering talentless fool, much like he did in *Raging Master's Tiger Crane*, who meets an old beggar played by Eagle Han, who of course is a kung-fu expert and eventually trains Tsui so that they can drive out some villains from the town. It's worth noting that there's also another principal cast member, an actress who plays the character of the original film title, however on both kmdb and hkmdb there are no details listed as to who she is. It's a shame, as she brightens up the movie considerably, thanks to being both attractive and able to kick butt. I have a shallow mind.

The comedy is teeth gratingly bad, and takes up a torturous hour plus of the run time. It's also absurdly sexual in nature. The beginning has a bunch of bad guys stripping both Tsui and Han, and then later on Tsui cross dresses to disguise himself as a girl. He ends up being assaulted by a rather robust henchman with pigtails, who not realizing it's a guy, attempts to rape him (onscreen it comes across a lot less serious than it does in writing), however that's not the absurd part. The absurd part is that there's a couple of henchmen watching on, one of whom is bald, and as they're watching one proceeds to start caressing the bald ones head, before kissing it and falling out of view behind some rocks. Weird. Tsui also distracts an opponent later on by kissing him.

The action itself ranges from the mediocre to actually quite decent. Tsui spends all but the finale basically being beaten up whenever he comes across the bad guys, until of course he masters what's referenced as the 7 Star Grand Mantis. The style actually has nothing to do with mantis kung-fu at all, it's Korean so of course is all about the kicks. The title is referenced only in the dubbing, and was slapped on for US distribution with little or no regard for it relating to the movie itself. Tsui doesn't really get to let loose here like he does in the finale of *Raging Master's Tiger Crane*, however Eagle Han adequately compensates, with some rapid fire exchanges and acrobatic kicks against Gwon Seong-ryong. The finishing move of the final fight though is definitely more comedy than kung-fu, and will likely leave you flabbergasted.

**Seven Steps Of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1979: Chester Wong, Ting Chun) - a.k.a Shaolin Raiders Of Death; Kung Fu Of Seven Steps** - Government traitor & Kung Fu master Chu Chin Kong (Chang Shan), is up to no good in a small Chinese village. He's plotting to reunite a villainous team of Martial Arts experts who call themselves the Five Hand Gang. Only the honorable Master Li (Ga Hoi) and his happy go lucky student Tiger (Ricky Cheng) can stop their evil ways and restore peace to the area.

This action packed Great China Film Company production is a fine example of 1970s independent Hong Kong cinema. Sure the stories basic and there's not a great deal of character development, but these have never been the genres strengths. The film is a great showcase for all the talents involved, of which there are many. Ricky Cheng landed a great movie debut when he agreed to appear in this production. His laid back happy to help character can be found in many Fu flicks. Often these characters can be too over the top or grating. Chengs portrayal of Tiger manages to avoid this in my opinion. He blends really nicely with Ga Hois wiser and more skilled Master Li. Li is a teacher, carpenter and not just a very skilled martial artist. He might just be the most skilled character in the film, who's equally as good at taking out the villains as he is at fixing your kitchen table. When Tiger brings home a gold dragon medal that a stranger accidently dropped in the village. His teacher suspects that his old enemies the Five Hand Gang are up to no good. The two work together to deal with the problem. Cue plenty of Martial Arts mayhem with some superbly choreographed & well executed old school fight scenes.

The fights were handled by the talented Tommy Lee who also appears in the film as member of the Five Hand Gang. His character is never given a name in the English dubbed print I watched. He worked on many films in the role of choreographer before he contributed to *Seven Steps Of Kung Fu*. From Bruce Lee exploitation in the form of *Fist Of Fury 2* to the Chi Kuan Chun classic *The Eagles Claw*. Its hard to pick faults here and all the fights were of a good to exceptional standard. You cant say that about too many films. That said the films not flawless, the two stylishly dressed Lamas played by Ching Kuo Chung & Lam Kai-Man add little to the movie. Their fight with Tiger is the poorest in the film. Thankfully its inter-cut with Master Li's tightly performed fight with Lin Dao Ho played by the ever reliable Lung Fei. The outfits the Lamas wear are more interesting than their actual characters. If you like the use of weapons in screen fights you might be left a little disappointed by this one. Most of the action is only empty handed but this didn't put me off at all. Ricky Cheng does show off some nice staff work in a couple of scenes. He goes up against one of the gang members in a nicely performed staff duel.

Now lets take a look at the Five Hand Gang and their tougher than steel leader Chu Chin Kong. For some reason not all of the characters are given names in the English dub released by Mill Creek. The gang consists of four males played by Lung Fei, Tommy Lee, Wong Chi San & Cheung Chung Kwai. The fifth member is a woman played by Lam Yi Wa (*Demon Strike*). Lam Yi Wa sadly gets little chance to show any of her abilities. The group answer to Lin Dao Ho who only takes orders from Chu Chin Kong. The gang are all bit of a mystery because they don't really go into any detail about them. That said they come across as a formidable force giving the heroes of the film a real challenge. Dealing with these guys is no easy task. Especially when there connected to the one of the greatest old schools villains ever played by the very talented Chang Shan. Shan is the theme my Secret Santa sent me earlier this month. Giving me a good excuse to finally sit down and watch this classic. Born in South Korea, Chang was brought into the world of Martial Arts cinema by the Eternal Film Company based in Hong Kong. They signed him to a contract after he won the world kung fu championships. He made his debut in *A Fistful Of Talons* and was then loaned out to appear in two other productions. One of those been *Seven Steps Of Kung Fu* which really displays his physical talents. Some might say he's underused with not much screen time. But I think in this case its more

effective to have him not appear on screen all the time. He ticks all the boxes that make a great Kung Fu film villain. He's got the look with his white hair & mustache but most importantly he's got the moves too. You just know by looking at him that this guy takes no crap from anyone on or off screen.

Before I finish I'd like to just take a quick look at the impressive two on one finale. Tiger and Master Li put their lives on the line as they finally catch up with Chu Chin Kong. During the showdown Chang Shan performs more eye watering splits than Van Damme has done in his entire career. I'm not putting Van Damme down when I say this either. There's a good balance of acrobatic skills and Martial Arts techniques on show. They cram so much into the fight you think it's longer than it actually is. Starting off with two fighters and then turns into a fast paced violent three on one fight. It's here that we get to see the flawless techniques of Chang Shan at his best. His kicking ability is up there with other greats of the era such as Casanova Wong and Hwang Jang Lee. He puts on a really good and convincing performance as the cold-hearted fighter with nerves of steel.

Overall this film is a must see if you like your 70's Kung Fu packed with plenty of quality action. That said don't expect a big budget polished looking production. There is little negative I can say about this film but that doesn't mean it's perfect or for everyone. The soundtrack must be one of the few featured on low budget Asian films not to make of any use of Lalo Schiffrin's scores. That was a refreshing and welcome change. While I may have put more focus on the film's villain there are other talents too. Ga Hoi (Mars Villa) puts on a really good show all round and plays one of the film's strongest characters. He nearly steals the spotlight from Ricky Cheng who shows he's more than capable of carrying a film himself. I'd like to mention Cheung Ching-Lan who plays Cheng's love interest and aid in the film. She doesn't take part in any of the fights yet she does have an active part in the whole film. The actress for some reason never appeared in any other films apart from this one. If you're a fan of the cast you won't be disappointed if you decide to buy it.

**Seven to One (Hong Kong, 1973: Hou Cheng)** - For those of you like me who were profoundly disappointed with *A Gathering of Heroes*, which brought together one of the greatest fighting divas of all time with Kurata, arguably the greatest Japanese screen fighter of all time, then *Seven to One* will inevitably come across as a step up, even if it's far from perfect as a movie, even by early 1970s standards. The story doesn't always make sense and the McGuffin plot ends up amounting to very little, but it does give us a generous helping of fight scenes from both Polly Kwan and Yasuaki Kurata, including the climax, so it does have something going for it.

This is one of the (relatively) few films that Polly made set in modern times, which means that we get Polly dressed in bell-bottoms and pink, red, and orange blouses, looking as hawt as ever. Seriously, I don't think I've seen the woman look as beautiful as she does here. Granted, I've only watched a handful of her movies, but I stand by my declaration with no shame whatsoever. What I find particularly interesting about her being so gorgeous here is that she never exposes any skin in this movie. I recently watched some of *Charlie's Angels* and it was all about the tight clothes, cleavage, unzipped jumpsuits with no bras on, etc. Most of the kung fu divas, especially those from the 1970s and 1980s, were just as charming, charismatic, beautiful, and sexy while still maintaining a modest dress code. It's an approach to filmmaking that the Chinese have always understood that Hollywood can never seem to get: you can make a sexy female action hero without rubbing her body in our faces at every opportunity.

On the other hand, the fact that this is the 1970s means that we also get to see Yasuaki Kurata as a evil karate-chopping rock singer(!) who, at one point, wears a lilac suit jacket over one of those frilly white dress shirts. I'm ashamed to admit, however, that I didn't pay much attention to the size of his lapels. I'll save that for another watching.

The movie opens the way any movie should: a bunch of guys attacking Polly Shang Kwan, playing a woman named Ting, for no reason, other than for her to beat them up and establish early on that she's more than a force to be reckoned with. After the scuffle, we switch scenes to an evil crime boss (Ma Chee, *The Killer Meteors* and *Tiger and Crane Fists*) spending time with his mistress (Yee Hung, *The Zodiac Fighters* and *Queen Bee*). I'm still not totally sure what their purpose in this movie is, and I've seen it twice. Maybe writing this synopsis will help me figure it out.

So we meet Miss Ting again at a bar, where some guy talks to her from behind his menu. We don't see who he is, but we do know that Miss Ting is looking for her father's murderer and is looking for clues at that moment. She's attacked at the bar, but quickly mops the floor with her attackers. We then cut to her snooping around the docks, because the docks are a wonderful place to set a fight scene. And what do you know, Ting is soon surrounded by dozens of goons armed with crowbars and chains. A prolonged fight breaks out, starting at the docks and ending in a tunnel. Ting is about to be overwhelmed when a convertible shows up out of nowhere and out pops Yasuaki Kurata. He beats up the rest of the thugs and takes Ting to safety.

Ting wakes up at Kurata's place, after eating some cake offered by Kurata's deaf-mute maid, head over to the club he works at as a rock singer. He doesn't stop to talk to her, but leaves her a note written on a matchbook. Ting

leaves the club and is attacked by more of the crime boss's goons. Kurata helps her fight them off and she heads back to his swingin' pad.

Kurata returns some time later with the crime boss's mistress, who turns out to be the owner of the club Kurata sings at, accompanying him. They're about to have some quality time together when the mistress figures out that they're not alone and starts searching the house for Miss Ting. Not having found her, she decides to go home. Kurata offers his place to Ting, telling her that it's too dangerous for her to go back to the hotel.

The next day, Kurata takes Ting on a fact-finding mission. Apparently she's looking for her Uncle (Chow Chung-Lim, *Superriders Against the Devils* and *Princess and the Toxicant*), who might be able to tell her about her father's murder. While not finding any leads initially, she does receive word from her uncle when she returns to her hotel. She also finds that she's being followed by even more of the crime boss's goons. Shaking them off her trail, she arrives at her uncle's mansion, where he tells her the story.

Apparently a week before, Ting's father (Shah Liu-Hui, *Moonlight Sword* and *Jade Lion* and *The Mighty One*) had requested for the uncle to meet him at a hotel. We then cut to footage of the father being chased by thugs all over the city before he can reach the hotel and talk to Uncle. Apparently he has an extremely valuable diamond ring in his possession. When the bad guys come a-knockin', Ting's father gives Uncle the ring and hides him on the balcony. The bad guys come barging in and the father shoots them to death with a pistol. You know, despite their being scores of bad guys associated with organized crime in this movie, nobody actually uses guns. Heck, they don't even use choppers. Practically everybody just fights with their fists and the occasional found object. It's fascinating just how much Chinese cinema warps reality in order to make a kung fu movie. But the thing about it is that it's far more believable when it happens in a Chinese movie than in a Hollywood film. There's just something about Chinese cinema that makes it easy to swallow that the characters live in a world where people use fisticuffs on each other at the slightest provocation. You just roll with it.

Getting back on track, the father is killed in his hotel room by the sudden appearance of Kurata, although the Uncle didn't see what had happened, so he isn't able to tell Polly to beware of him. By this point, the film is entering the last act, which means we'll get a heavy dose of fight scenes from here on out. Kurata ends up picking up Polly and taking him to the mistress' house. She tells Polly how much she hates the crime boss for being a lecherous creep (we're treated to a phone call in which the crime boss asks the woman if she's naked and whatnot). When Polly and Kurata leave the place, they are attacked by the crime boss's men, while boss and his personal bodyguards enter the mistress' house. Polly and Kurata go back into the house to find the mistress dead (and naked—this is an early 1970s kung fu film after all) in the bathtub.

Kurata and Polly rush over to the crime boss's house, only to discover that he's not there. There's an interesting moment of gratuitous violence in this scene when the two question the maid as to where the boss is. She says she doesn't know, but they figure that he's gone to her uncle's house. Kurata tells Polly to go to his car. After she leaves, Kurata turns around and delivers a karate chop to the top of the maid's head, who falls back into a chair. My wife saw that scene the first time I watched this and asked me if he had killed her. I told her that he had only left her unconscious, even though it was pretty clear from the flashback sequence that Kurata's karate chop was indeed lethal. If I were Badmovies.org, I'd refer to this scene as a RANDOM ACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST A MAID!

So the boss and his men are busy attacking Polly's uncle. Polly and Kurata show up and a huge fight breaks out. This is where Yasuaki Kurata finally shows his true colors to Polly, giving some nonsensical speech about how she's good enough to take on six men at once, but not seven, or something like that. We also learn that the crime boss never even knew about the diamond ring McGuffin in the first place, making me wonder why exactly his men had spent the previous 70 minutes attacking Polly. Kurata also explains to us why the ring was so important in the first place: it had the password to a secret account in Switzerland inscribed on it.

Although I'd hardly call Hou Cheng a great director, he does keep the film paced reasonably well, which is more than I can say for his colleague Griffin Yueh. The first 25 minutes or so are brimming with action, after which the film slows down a little until the 50-minute mark, after which it becomes one fight after another, broken up by one of the lowest-octane car chases ever filmed. He also knows that we, the viewer, want to see Polly and Kurata fight, which he delivers to us in spades. Heck, even the second act is consistently interesting, because we at least have Polly to look at and an extended chase involving her character's father.

I guess Hou and Polly must've gotten along quite well, since he also directed *The Rangers* (which I'll be reviewing later on this year) and *The Zodiac Fighters*. He also seemed to have had a gift for kung fu weirdness, as *The Zodiac Fighters* has gone down in history as the film that featured Polly Kuan fighting against men in lobster costumes, while his *Shaolin Invincibles* is the movie with the infamous kung fu gorillas. *Seven to One* is A LOT more down to Earth than those films, to be sure.

Once again, the Leung father/son team and Tommy Lee are on board for the action, which both more plentiful and entertaining than in *A Gathering of Heroes*. As I've already stated, both Kurata and Kuan get to participate in numerous fights, which is a very good thing. Kuan, who was trained in three different martial arts (karate, judo, and tae kwon do) gets ample opportunity to show off all of her skills. Her kicks, while not especially flashy, are quite hard-hitting here and she gets a lot more height on them than a lot of screen fighters during the early 1970s. She

mainly uses reverse punches and elbows when it comes to handwork, but it's done with more flair than your average Basher film from the same time. This is some of her best work here, no doubt about it.

Kuan is matched move for move by Kurata, who gets to show off his own considerable kempo and aikido skills (mainly the former, though). He's actually a lot quicker and more powerful than Kuan is, although he loses to her ultimately because he's the bad guy. However, losing in hand-to-hand combat to Polly Shang Kuan Ling Feng is like Hwang Jang-Lee losing to John Liu: we know that the villain in real life is a lot better than the hero, but the hero is awesome enough onscreen that we buy it anyways. Despite the general claims about Lau Kar-Leung's masterpiece *Heroes of the East* (1979) being the first Chinese movie to show respect for Japanese martial arts, I'll say that Kurata and Polly were doing Japanese styles justice as early as 1973.

The only false move that the movie makes is at the finale, which begins with a motorcycle/car chase that is not very exciting. It doesn't help that both vehicles look to be going at the speed limit, instead of above it. It also ends on a particularly silly note, with Polly leaping out of the motorcycle and into a rowboat as the former falls into the harbor. It's edited in such a way that it comes across like she's magically teleporting from one vehicle to the other.

The chase is followed by a brief fight between Kuan and Kurata, which is all well and good. However, it doesn't take long for Kuan to literally punch Kurata's lights out (so to speak), and so the last five minutes of the movie is Kuan sneaking around to avoid a blinded and crazed Kurata, which isn't quite my idea of a fitting final fight.

When all is said and done, *Seven to One* is a fun slice of early 1970s kung fu. The quality of the fighting is up to the standards set by Sammo Hung in the Angela Mao films he choreographed during the same era and Polly puts most of her contemporaries, like Jimmy Wang Yu, David Chiang, Lo Lieh, Shih Tzu, and others to shame. The story is very much more than "Polly Kuan beats people up because of some McGuffin that most of the bad guys aren't even aware of," but then, this past weekend was the same one in which I watched *Shaitani Dracula*, the film in which no scene logically followed the one before it, so *Seven to One* looks perfectly fine by comparison. Truth to be told so I could accept a movie about Polly beating people up for no good reason, if the fights are well done. I'm pretty sure I'll come across that film at some point.

**Shadow Boxer, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Pao Hsieh-Li)** - One starring vehicle was all Chen Wo-Fu logged before his suicide at 24 and while *The Shadow Boxer* makes it clear we weren't dealing with a fully grown star, there was charisma in the real life Tai Chi champion. As part of the very proper martial arts values and morals of the film, there is occasional dramatic strength Chen is part of (dealing with tolerance within the Tai Chi style taught to him) but director Pau Hsieh-Li (co-director of *Boxer From Shantung*) merely churns out Shaw Brother's standards here. Attentive viewers may even draw parallels to the similar structure between this film and *The Big Boss* (Chen even had a passing resemblance to Bruce Lee). Yuen Woo-Ping co-directed the largely unspectacular action.

**Shadow Ninja (Hong Kong, 1980: Joe Cheung)** – aka *Killer in White* - First of all, there are no ninjas in this film, and the alternate title is more fitting: *Killer in White* Buddy cop period kung fu comedy starring Stephen Tung as the young tough rookie, and Roy Chiao as the wise vet. The first half of the film focuses on the interaction between the two, and is mostly comedy. It starts out as the vet being annoyed by the youngin', and they grow to be friends. The comedy isn't the annoying/weird comedy many of these films have, but it wasn't particularly funny either. A few scenes made me chuckle though, and the few fights in the first half were fantastic. I had to look up the stars, although I recognized Stephen Tung. I'd say this is the best performance I've seen of him, because he didn't stand out much to me in other films I have seen. Here he pulls some top notch slapstick shapes, and definitely steals the show as far as fighting goes.

The tone changes pretty jarringly and suddenly about halfway through the movie. It become very dark while our heroes try to find a serial killer on the run. The story is nothing special, and there is basically no mystery to solve. With that said, the movie did get better in the second half. There is more action, and it goes from slapstick to pretty serious and bloody. The finale was very good and brutal with some painful looking shapes action.

All of the fights were good, but their were two stand outs to me: Stephen Tung fights a guy with a knife, and the knife guy is passing his knife from one hand to the other while seamlessly fighting, it was impressive. The other being the finale.

Overall, it is a good indie that I will probably revisit. Decent story, but I feel it could have been great if it built to the events in the second half, and put more mystery around them. The first half while not boring, felt pretty run of the



mill outside of a few (too few) good fights. If the whole film was on par with the second half, it'd probably stand among the best independent films for me...but it wasn't.

**Shadow Whip, The (Hong Kong, 1971: Lo Wei)** - Very good movie. Great acting and a decent story, even if it was a little predictable. The whole cast put on a solid acting performance, particularly Cheng Pei Pei and Ku Feng(surprised?). It was nice seeing Tien Feng as something other than an "evil Jap". Yueh Hua was great as the "stoic" swordsman, about as good as anyone I'll say, but that should also be no surprise as he is one of the better actors Shaw had IMO. The movie was pretty dark/grim overall, and basically gets progressively darker as it goes on, after starting off with a bit of comedy/singing courtesy of Lee Kwan. The movie keeps a blistering pace from word-go that works to its advantage given the simple(but good) plot, no doubt helped by the short run time. (78 min.)

The action was great, although at times it was too sped up. The choreography was simple but very well done, with some great swordplay. There were the usual moments during big fights where there were many extras dancing around doing nothing. Yueh Hua was the standout in the action department, as he brought great presence in both action and dramatic scenes. As a matter of fact, this may be my favorite overall performance of his. With that said, everyone involved did a good job. Simon Chui Yee-Ang did a great job with the action, especially considering he was working with mostly non martial artists(to my knowledge).

There were some beautiful shots of the snowy mountainside locations, as well as fantastic sets and costumes. A couple of these sets looked like they may have been used in The One Armed Swordsman? One thing I like about the Shaws of this era compared to those made in the late 70s and onward are the locations... The films seemed to use less and less of them as time went on, and while I love Shaw sets, there is no denying the beauty and adventurous feeling that good use of locations can bring.

The opening scene where Lee Kwan was singing as he drives the carriage was amusing. I wasn't sure whether to laugh or just smile, lol. The only real negatives I can think of are the (very)poor wire-work, and a few scenes are a little too sped up. Outside of that, this movie is a blast, with some solid action, a decent plot, and some great acting performances and direction. Which brings me to another point, after seeing this and Brothers 5(which its been a while, I need to revisit), I am curious to see more of Lo Weis output at Shaw.

**Shanghai Lil and the Sunluck Kid (Taiwan, 1973: Chu-Got Ching-Wan) – The Champion; Karate King** - I was recently reflecting on my fetish for Asian women who kick major behind and the why's and when's involved. What got me thinking about it was the part of me that rebelled the moment I found out that Maggie Q was going to play Mai Shiranui in the **King of Fighters** film. Knowing how little emotional investment I have in SNK games, I was rather curious at my own reaction to the news. It led me to think about how long I have enjoyed watching (and playing) Asian female fighting femme fatales. I came to the conclusion that it all probably started with Chun Li in **Street Fighter II** and gained considerable momentum after **Supercop** introduced me to Michelle Yeoh.

It was this fetish that, in part, led me to watch this obscure little Shaw Bros films, since one of its main stars is underappreciated screen fighter Shih Szu. Shih Szu is something of a transitional leading lady in Shaw Bros cinema, at least from what I can tell. Her career was at its peak during the early 1970s, kind of the bridge between Cheng Pei Pei and Kara Hui Ying-Hung. She's easy on the eyes, but not the most beautiful of the lot. She's not the best female fighter, either. But there's a bit of moxy in her that's evident here that made me love her fight scenes, despite the fact that they don't hold a candle to what Angela Mao and Polly Shang Kuan Ling Feng were doing at the same time.

The story begins with a kung fu master getting out of jail (and kicking holes in the wall as he's leaving just to show the jailers what he thought of the experience). Even before he reaches town, a gang of men, sent by his brother, attack him and (unsuccessfully) try to kill him. At the same time, Shih Szu barges into the coal mine that the guy's brother runs and tell him to leave his ex-con sibling alone, beating some people up while she's at it. The evil brother has her thrown into the dungeon for her troubles. He then sends more men to tell his brother to get out of town.

The good brother reaches town and finds out that his brother has become something of a bad seed, shutting down their parents' kung fu school and running the town with an iron grip, with the help of some Russians who remain offscreen for the duration of the film. After dispatching of a second welcoming party from his brother, a group of shifty (were there any other kind in the 1970s) Japanese martial artists offer to help him clear the town of his brother. He refuses.

After a couple of more murder attempts from his brother's thugs, including a gang of tae kwon do experts and a strong wrestler, the two brothers meet. The good ex-con brother pleads with his brother to go good, but the latter refuses and threatens to kill Shih Szu if he tries anything funny. Luckily, Shih is freed when one of the miners, a friend of the brothers' parents, sneaks into her room and frees her.

There's another big action scene between the good brother and the evil brother's gang, which is around the 2/3 mark of the film. From that point on, the film becomes a blueprint to *Rumble in the Bronx* is that a new set of villains is introduced and the whole running conflict between the two brothers is COMPLETELY DISPENSED WITH. In this case, the Japanese show up and kill the evil brother and take over the town, forcing the town's men to slave in the mines for their own profit. The good brother and Shih Szu team up to send those dastardly Japanese back to Nippon...in pieces.

This film is generally classified as a "basher" film, which is a reference to the style of fighting on display. In "Basher" films, traditional technique and fancy moves are often discarded in favor of a more brutal and realistic (i.e. sloppy) style of screen fighting. Jimmy Wang Yu is best known for this type of fighting and a lot of kung fu films made between 1970 and 1975 can be classified as such.

One thing that a lot of basher films have in common is that the Japanese almost always show up as villains of one sort or another. This film is no exception, and the introduction of the Japanese as the supreme bad guys in the third act completely undermines what would've been a slightly deeper than usual chopsockey film.

For fans of female fighting fury, you'll have to wait until the second half to see Shih Szu start unleashing her moves on everybody. She spends most of the first half in captivity, which is a shame. Nonetheless, her fights against the Japanese are really fun, even if her fighting, especially her kicks, are a bit sloppy. It's pretty clear that the filmmakers were trying to film her as if she were the next Angela Mao or something, judging by her fighting style, hair, and clothes. Unfortunately, she lacks Angela's intensity and head-kicking skills.

The rest of the fights are solid by early 1970s standards (average by the standards of anything made after 1976). The hand techniques used by the fighters' are okay, but the kicks are generally low and sloppy. There are some whips, ropes, swords, and knives used for variety. Nonetheless, there's nothing really groundbreaking here.

**Shaolin Avengers, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Chang Cheh)** --- For fight sequences, all I can say regarding the quantity is wow! The action is constant, almost mind-numbingly so. (And I can't believe I'm saying that.)

As far as the quality, um...did I mention there are a lot of fights? I mean a lot. The action directors were Hsieh Hsing and Chan San-Yat. The choreography is solid and consistent, but I never really saw any sequences that just blew me away. Again I have yet to see Fu Sheng in a film where he really impresses me to give me the sense of awe that many of you have for him. I don't mean that as a put down, so please don't take it that way. He's good here, especially with his hands, but I don't see him as a great kicker. I was more impressed with Chi Kuan-Chun's performance. Not a whole lot of kicks from him either, but he demonstrated more power and impact to me.

I liked how Cheh used the red filter for the death scenes of characters. Simplistic and yet cool. And the end was in a word: *Yikes!* Man, that hurt to watch.

**Shaolin Boxers, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Wong Daat)** - Got a copy and could not finish it. Just a really blah, average movie. Some nice kicks here and there, but all in all, just a dud. May be why I've never heard of this movie. Flicks like this are probably what sunk Tien's career as a leading man. His character is basically a dick, who is loyal to his sifu, but treats his fellows students with little more than contempt. He really treat Han Kwok-Choi poorly, pushing him out of the way and so on. Choi actually has some of the more entertaining fights in the movie. I remember him from *Kung Fu the Invisible Fist* as the shoe shine boy, who had some acrobatic moves in that as well. Of course he got killed in that one. I can't tell you what happened to him in this one, I feel asleep. Maybe I'll fast forward to the end some time, or maybe not.

**Shaolin Brothers (Taiwan, 1976: Joseph Kuo)** - Several years earlier than 'Mr Vampire' and 'Encounters of the Spooky Kind', Joseph Kuo employed the Taoist priest and hopping corpse themes to add an extra dimension to this rather lavish production.

The plot seems a little disjointed with the 'Shaolin Brother' theme of two rival students from Shaolin, one (Carter Wong) who becomes an evil Manchu general corrupted by power while the other remains noble and upstanding, being pushed into the background. The main part of the story concerns the Manchu General's efforts to find a rebel leader who has gone into hiding. The rebel leader and his men pretend to be dead so that they can travel incognito as hopping corpses under the guidance of a Taoist priest (who is completely ignorant of the fact that his charges are very much alive). The 'Shaolin Brothers' story re-emerges in the final reel when the two adversaries finally face each other.

Production values seem to have been relatively high although we do get to see similar sets and locations to some of Joseph Kuo's other Shaolin Temple based works. One scene in particular is almost an exact copy from 'The Blazing Temple' in terms of location, costumes, premise and even camera angles (or maybe that was my imagination). It's just the actors that are different (the scene I'm referring to is near the start of 'Burning Temple' where Chia Ling attempts to assassinate the Manchu general).

What's particularly interesting is the early use of wirework which, while rather unsophisticated by the standard set in the nineties, still gives the action a nice extra lift. The wires are a little obvious at times and actors often seem to just be swinging about but then this was 1976 and relatively early in terms of wirework development.

The film seems to lose its way in the middle section as ambitious action pieces are not as exciting as they should be due to poor lighting making it difficult to actually follow what's happening (the scene is set in a forest). Also watching large groups fighting from long distances is never as cinematically gripping as well choreographed 'one on one' fights which are mainly reserved for the final reel where the film does manage to pick up.

**Shaolin Chastity Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1981: Robert Tai) – aka Revenge of the Dragon** - Dammit this movie is awesome. Halfway through, I felt it was so-so, but by the end, I succumbed to its charm and silliness. (the bad ass fighting helped too)

So yeah it basically doesn't have a plot, but who cares when its filled with good fights and training scenes. This movie is crazy, but not crazy enough for the weird Fu thread. Yes it has scenes like a guy "head butting" another man which results in the mans body splitting in half and both halves FLYING across the screen... But that's part of why its so weird... It feels like such a normal kung fu movie most the time, then something like that happens, or Alexander Lo Rei wrestles down a real bull(Yeah he just shot up like 10x in the possible real life badass kung fu actor rankings for me)... There is also the happy children chant soundtrack, and the ridiculous costumes. A couple of examples, one guy has shoulder pads and chainmail sleeves, but nothing on his torso; Another is wearing what may as well be a Wheres Waldo onesie, more on him in a bit.

I don't know why, but the scene immediately after the lead villain breaks out of his...cage?, was hilarious to me. It abruptly cuts from him breaking out, to his back facing the camera wearing a vest suit and fedora as his men "dress him" or something.. He looked so "cool", I lost it.. I actually rewound it a couple of times, rofl.

The cast consists mostly of the supporting cast of Shaolin vs Lama, then obviously Alexander Lo Rei. Robert Tai and Wang Chi Sang did a good job with the action, (as expected) it is varied and very good. I don't know most of the cast by name, and the few I do, didn't get much screen time. (William Yen, Wang Chi Sang). Anyway everyone involved was pretty awesome. I didn't recognize the girl(Hilda Lui?), but she was very impressive, Kim Fan also stood out whenever he was on screen, his jump kicks were crazy! (hes another new one to me). The lead villain was pretty good too, and surprisingly agile for being a pretty big guy. The kids were all impressive, especially their Buddha formations, some serious physical ability there, with that said, they didn't do much real choreographed fighting. Every main villain died by some kind of a lame gimmick, and sometimes the action was too zoomed in (on my dvd at least), those are my only complaints.

Now back to my guy, who I'll call Waldo for now. Who the hell is this guy? He is awesome, acrobatic, kicking, hand to hand, weapons this guy lit it up every time he is on the screen. I need to see more. He also put on an extremely impressive display with a chain weapon (chain with claw on the end of it.), which you don't see often, as it is clearly a hard one to look good using without the help of editing.

I liked it, very entertaining, and I'll watch it again some time. It is no Shaolin vs Llama, but bears some similarities, such as silly costumes, monks, chicken, and of course the cast.

**Shaolin Daredevils (Hong Kong, 1979: Chang Cheh)** - The Venoms once again dazzle with an impressive display of martial arts and acrobatics in another lavish Shaw Brothers production set in the early 1900's. This is probably my favourite of all of the Venoms films I've seen. With its high production values the film has a very stylish look and classy sets typical of Shaw Brothers. The fact that it is practically all filmed within studio sets gives it a very consistent style. The plot is typically uninvolved but there are plenty of fights and the film never seems to lose its pace.

This time they're all on the same side as they take on a corrupt general who has assumed power by assassinating his superior. The son of the murdered general (Lo Meng), no homeless, turns to his friends to help him get revenge.

Again we're given another excellent display of Chinese Opera style martial arts with plenty of tumbling and acrobatics. There are a couple of showcase scenes where Kuo Choi, Lu Feng and Chiang Sheng pretend to be street performers and simply dazzle with their skills. When it comes to the fighting equal screen time is given to all five members of the team but Lo Meng's show stopping nunchaku sequence stood out for me. It's unusual because I don't think I've ever seen this weapon used in a Shaw Brothers film before. The final showdown sees a three on one battle staged in a warehouse where anything that comes to hand (spades, iron bars, etc) is used as a weapon. This sequence contains some fantastically intricate choreography.

It's a crying shame that these films are practically unobtainable at the moment and one hopes that it isn't too long before the Malaysian tycoon that bought the rights to Shaw's entire back catalogue finally makes them available (he certainly seems to be taking his time).

**Shaolin Deadly Kicks (Taiwan, 1977: Wu Ma)** - aka **Flashlegs**- Three years ago, a band of robbers known as the 8 Dragons, took a treasure map and split it into 8 pieces, one for each member. Now, a cop (Dorian Tan) will stop at nothing to retrieve the pieces at any cost.

Flashlegs the movie! To those of you reading this that may not be aware of the fact that the star of this movie, Dorian Tan, is actually nicknamed "Flashlegs", I have to say, his nickname is very well deserved for this incredibly quick leg fighter.

The movie itself has some fairly decent action in it, but the plot at times drags along. When you combine these two facts together puts it at about average. At the start of the movie, we see 8 masked men who we quickly find out are known as the 8 Dragons. They steal a treasure map, and one of the men decides he will hold on to the map and in three years time they will all meet up and uncover the hidden treasure. Well the other seven men do not really like this idea of just this one man holding on to the map, so the map is cut up into 8 pieces with each of the men getting one piece. Close to three years have passed, and the star of the movie is seen on the screen, Dorian Tan. We learn he is a cop, and is out to retrieve all the stolen pieces of the map in order to return it to its rightful owner. In doing so, he has also taken the lives of six of the eight men that were each holding a piece of the map. The two men that are left are aware of what he has done and who he is. One wants to kill the cop, while the other wants him alive because his daughter has developed feelings for him. The movie itself is not bad at all, but it also is not the most exciting movie I have ever seen. I do have to say whenever Dorian Tan was on the screen, the excitement jumped up a few notches. Lo Lieh's performance also was attention grabbing as well, he really played a great villain.

The action was entertaining and fun. Dorian's kicks were the highlight of the film. Some acrobatic maneuvers as well as hand to hand combat is what consisted of the majority of the action. A few weapons were used here and there.

Blood was kept to a minimum in this film. Only your typical signs of internal bleeding when someone was struck with a death blow.

I really have to take note of two Standout Performers in this movie. Dorian Tan of course mainly for his kicking ability and fight scenes. Lo Lieh gave a standout performance as a villain. His fighting skills were barely average in this film, but his acting skill was above average if you ask me.

A definite must buy for any Dorian Tan or Lo Lieh fans. If you are not particularly a DT or LL fan, then I have to recommend you borrow this movie from a friend or rent it before you buy.

**Shaolin Devil, Shaolin Angel (Taiwan, 1977: Joseph Cheung)** - aka **Shaolin Devil & Angel**, aka **Mask of Death** - All right, let's see if we can make sense of this one: There's a Mr. Wan (and since the closing credits didn't match up the actors with the characters they played, you're just going to have to do without that service), renowned locally as a philanthropist, so people bring to him a sick guy dressed in yellow with those preternatural white eyebrows that

show up in these movies so often. The yellow guy makes some comment to Wan about how Wan really wants to be number one...

Elsewhere, Mr. Wang, who is apparently the brother of Mr. Wan (unless people in their cultural class simply like calling each other "brother") laments the fact that his son, Ching Wen, is more interested in pansy-like things like books and acupuncture than the manly art of kung fu (which I think is okay until Ching Wen offers that old cop-out, "Violence is never the answer!" -- but I've ranted on that at length elsewhere, so we'll let it go). After being dissed out by Dad, Ching Wen meets an elderly abbot at the door who offers to teach him kung fu (in between offering bits of fortune cookie wisdom). Ching Wen declines as politely as he can and sends him on his way.

Okay then. Wan and Wang are called before the local government guy, who tells them that there are just an oodles of killings going on in the area, representatives of each of the prominent local clans. There's going to be a special investigator called in, but in the meantime, Wan and Wang are charged with finding the culprit.

Which they promptly do, it being the yellow dude. They and their men find him at night, and engage in the requisite kung fu barrage before Wan finally skewers him. And that should put an end to the murders, I bet.

Then we meet a mysterious kung fu fighter at a brothel (his name is An Wen, and it took me most of the movie to catch his name), where he speaks to a mysterious boss-lady behind a curtain, and offers his services as an assassin. And here's another thing it took me forever to catch -- when he meets a girl in one of the rooms and she starts to disrobe, there are characters painted on her back. These, see, are the names of his targets. Given that these are never translated for us in subtitles or anything, how long did it take me to figure it out? Oh, roughly four-fifths of the movie; up until then, I just wondered, "Hey, what's with the writing on the prostitute's back, and why does this guy keep going back to the cathouse?"

Anyway. Then the distinctive killings start up again, including a break-in at Wang's birthday party where just enough people are killed to send a message (and send all the guests packing with lame excuses). So Wan and Wang go hunting again (which sounds like a better birthday celebration anyway), but this time get their asses handed to them. An Wen arrives late, to find the bodies, along with Ching Wen and... a girl. I never did catch her name, or her relationship to anyone, although she's obviously family (Ching Wen's sister? Wan's daughter? I dunno, but she's sure easy on the eyes). Anyway, after the kung fu introductions, Ching Wen then goes with the wandering abbot to learn kung fu to avenge his father, while Cutie-Face followed An Wen as he makes his several trips to the brothel and then goes out and kills bandits and stuff.

I hope my summary has seemed coherent up until now, because here's where it really gets screwy. Basically, Stuff Happens, including:

- The abbot puts Ching Wen through his paces, demonstrating again the tradition from which George Lucas lifted the entire Dagobah sequence in *The Empire Strikes Back*.
- Cutie-Pie tracks An Wen to the brothel and gets into a fight with several of the men there, demonstrating her own kung fu prowess; maybe Ching Wen shoulda stuck with her. (Cuter than the abbot, too.)
- An Wen continues to receive mysterious messages of people to kill; in one scene, he thoughtfully carves the victims' names onto gravestones, then meets them on the road and kills them.
- Cute-Stuff masquerades as a man (at least, I think that's what we're supposed to believe) to follow An Wen into the brothel and gets herself an eyeful.
- An Wen turns out to be the government agent, who is, I guess, also doing assassin stuff on the side.
- An Wen gets attacked by a guy in the brothel who fights with flying snakes, and is nursed back to health by Cutie-Cheeks, who then gets to hear the whole sob story of how he doesn't like women because his mother deserted him and he was sold into servitude in a brothel and the prostitute he loved turned on him. (Nevertheless, An Wen and his PowerPuff Girl fall in love.)

By the time it came to get to all the exposition as to what the heck all this meant, my brain was too numb to absorb it. Suffice it to say that there was a conspiracy afoot, and just about everybody's related to everybody else, and the secret "real killer" is nigh-invincible. The only thing that can defeat him is a big-ass bout between him, An Wen, Sweet-Cheeks, and the newly-trained Ching Wen -- a fight that seemed to last a full twenty minutes. (All right, I admit it: It was late at night, and I kept nodding off. But each time I roused myself, dammit, they were still fighting!)

So. When all is said and done, what the hell have they been saying and doing? Maybe it was chopped by either the original producer or the American distributor. Or maybe the dubbing wiped out several of the nuances that could have been clues. Or maybe it's just a story that someone outside the culture wouldn't be able to follow well. Whatever the reason, the best use for a movie like this (aside from the pop-culture caché of having a video entitled

Shaolin Devil, Shaolin Angel on display) is to put it on in the background at a party. It's colorful enough to add some fun, and not noteworthy enough to distract from the real action.

**Shaolin Disciple (Hong Kong, 1980: Man Man)** - Although it tries some actual filmmaking techniques and does not fully rely on the cliché structure of switching from serious to kung fu comedy, there's still nothing noteworthy here. That feeling lingers throughout because in all honesty, it's TOO rich on characters and sidetracks. Coherency-level drops, even though the sections containing possible supernatural elements increase the energy for a bit. Revenge, gold from a robbery is at the forefront but with poor exposition dumps and only flashes of intricate choreography (mainly during the swordplay ending), the movie fades really fast during and certainly after viewing. Starring Lau Ga-Yung, Kwan Hoi-San and Ku Feng.

**Shaolin Dolemite (Taiwan, 1986/1999: Robert Tai)** - Not a sequel at all to Robert Tai's crazy ninja movie but a selection of fight scenes from the additional 10 hours or so that was shot for the original film. Mixed in are some new scenes featuring seventies blaxploitation star Rudy Ray Moore but thankfully these are very brief and only amount to about 15 minutes or so. In contrast there's about 90 minutes of footage from 'Ninja Final Duel'

There's a very small amount of plot that involves Eugene Thomas as a kind of shaman teaming up with the ninja clan to try and bring about the demise of Shaolin. With the worst dubbing ever in a kung fu movie, his character is called 'Tupac of the Dolemite Clan'.

In fact all of the cast from the first movie appear, although often as different characters. Alice Tseng (again baring her breasts) makes a welcome return but this time she's on the side of the ninjas as a character named 'Phantasm'. She has a nude steamy sex scene with Eugene Thomas which does nothing to advance the plot one iota. Of course Alexander Lo Rei is back again and we also get to see Robert Tai as Alexander's mentor. Last but by no means least there an appearance by the UK's very own Toby Russell.

The film is literally one mad frenetic fight scene after another. Expectedly again there is quite a bit of undercranking but also again it is the sheer complexity of the fights, and their fast pace, that makes them so enjoyable. The film culminates in a massive 30 minute fight scene where Robert Tai pulls out all the stops and delivers one explosive sequence after another. This can't really be viewed as a film in its own right, rather a chance to see some of the footage that didn't make it into the first film. Don't expect any plot and don't worry about Rudie Ray Moore; he's hardly in it.

**Shaolin Drunk Fighter (South Korea, 1983: Choe U-Hyeong, To Man-Bo) - aka: The Royal Monks - Shaolin Drunk Fighter** is arguably one of the best choices I could've made for a final film in my drunken boxing movie binge. Out of all the movies I watched, it's the only one that really breaks out of the Seasonal formula mold established by the Jackie Chan hits *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master* in 1978. It's probably not the last drunken boxing film to come out during the old school period, but its 1983 release year is significant, at least in Hong Kong. The previous year had seen the release of some of the most beloved classics of the genre, including Sammo Hung's *The Prodigal Son*, Jackie Chan's genre swan song *Dragon Lord*, Lau Kar-Leung's *Legendary Weapons of China*, Corey Yuen's solo directorial debut *Ninja in the Dragon's Den*, and Yuen Woo-Ping's sorcery classic *The Miracle Fighters*. It also saw the release and success of the first Mainland Chinese kung fu film, *Shaolin Temple*, which launched Jet Li's career.

1982, however, was sort of the last hurrah for the kung fu movie, at least in Hong Kong. From there on out, successful period pieces tended to be of the more fantastic variety, like *Zu: Warriors of Magic Mountain* and *A Chinese Ghost Story*. *Shaolin Drunk Fighter* came out when the kung fu genre was quickly becoming an anachronism whose popularity was all but dead in Hong Kong, but still alive in other territories in Asia, like Taiwan and South Korea.

Interestingly enough, South Korea really jumped on the kung fu bandwagon in the late 70s and early 80s (although they started making martial arts films in the early 1970s), making a valiant attempt to copy their Chinese counterparts in terms of story and choreography. Instead of glorifying their own martial history, Korean filmmakers seemed content with churning out their own Bruceploitation films, films set at the Shaolin Temple, and *Drunken Master* rip-offs, probably because it was more profitable to do so. These movies often starred washed-up Hong Kong and Taiwanese actors (Eddie Ko Hung, for example), in addition to Korean actors (Dragon Lee, Elton Chong, Casanova Wong, and of course, Legendary Super Kicker Hwang Jang Lee), many of whom had experience in the Hong

Kong and Taiwanese markets. If viewers were lucky, they'd get a talented veteran like Corey Yuen or Chin Yuet-Sang to work on the choreography. When that didn't happen, the results were often dismal, ranking down there with the very worst.

Although mainly a South Korean production, *Shaolin Drunk Fighter* does have some Chinese talent in front of the camera, though none of the actors were what one might call "big." I suppose you could call Unicorn Chan "big," if only because of his connections to Bruce Lee. The sole review of it at the Hong Kong Movie Database suggests that it's a South Korea-China co-production, which would make some sense. However, most of the actors that had any sort of a notable career worked in Hong Kong and Taiwan, not in Mainland China. What's mostly fascinating about it, however, is that's really a product of the time in that instead of ripping off *Drunken Master*, it rips off its contemporaries, namely *Duel to the Death* and *Shaolin Temple*.

We start off with a decidedly *wuxia* beginning, with a evil General, Tiger Ko (Hau Chiu-Sing, *Stroke of Death* and *Five Superfighters*), cackling over his having killed a rival general. Unfortunately for him, two of the fallen general's retainers have taken his son, Huang Chi-Yeh (Jacky Liu Hong-Yi, *Funny Kung Fu* and *Edge of Fury*), into the forest. Tiger Ko sends his guards, led by the great Unicorn Chan (*Way of the Dragon* and *Fist of Unicorn*) after the three. The guards are old school *wuxia* types, they wear cone-shaped hats and carry exotic weapons, in this case, a pair of spears that look to have been severed in half. The guards kill one of the retainers, but Huang and the other escape.

Enter a Japanese samurai, Lu Shing Yi Pu (Hyeon Kil-Su, *Shaolin Drunk Monk* and *Mantis Under Falcon Claws*), who's in China in order to challenge the monks of the Shaolin Temple and perhaps learn from them. He's eating at a restaurant when a couple of swordsman types poison him. They try to jump him outside of a town, but Huang and the retainer show up and kill most of dishonorable knights errant. Unfortunately, one of them escapes and runs into Unicorn Chan's bunch. The hunt is on.

Huang and his companion nurse the samurai back to health, who disappears before they can really learn about him. They wander around a little more in the forest before they meet Lu Shing's sister, Miss Yeda (Guk Jeong-Suk, *Snake Woman* and *The Young Taoism Fighter*). She asks him if they've seen her brother, but they're not much help to her. The movie makes it seem like Huang is unable to make the connection between the two when she first asks. I mean, how many Japanese samurai were running around China during the Ming Dynasty, anyway? Unicorn and his mob eventually catch up to Huang and kill his retainer before injuring him and causing him to fall to his doom.

Only it's not his doom. Miss Yeda finds him and nurses him back to the health, or at least partially so. It's while she's looking after him that an alcoholic monk, Yuen Kong (Chiang Cheng, *The Tigress of Shaolin* and *Shadowblade*), appears and decides to take Huang to Shaolin. This being the Ming Dynasty and not the Qing, Huang's not allowed to stay at the temple past the initial caring for his wounds, since the establishment doesn't accept laymen. Huang agrees to become a monk and ritualistically shaves his head, takes some vows, and ultimately starts learning kung fu.

Of course, it's only a matter of time before Unicorn's half-spear wielding secret service team finds out that Huang is now a Shaolin monk. Tiger Ko, upon discovering this, sends a Japanese ninja platoon that conveniently showed up at his HQ looking for work to kill Huang. If they fail, there's always Unicorn Chan and Ko himself to do the dirty work.

It's pretty clear that *Shaolin Drunk Fighter* is nothing more than a pastiche of other, better genre films. It is amusing that none of those films is *Drunken Master*. Let's see: Japanese samurai who wants to challenge Shaolin? Sounds like *Duel to the Death*'s conflict between Norman Tsui's samurai and Damian Lau's Shaolin swordsman. How about burrowing, disappearing, and exploding ninjas? Those were in *Duel to the Death*, too. What about the endless scenes of Shaolin monks doing weapons forms? Or the injured hero who is carried to Shaolin while on the run from a corrupt warlord? How about the alcoholic monk who teaches the hero the drunken pole technique just giving a demonstration? That's easily *Shaolin Temple* territory if you ask me. And the whole bit with the hero being the son of a murdered official/military officer saved by his father's retainers could've showed up in any low-budget Taiwanese *wuxia* film made in the 1970s.

Now, being a mixture of other films isn't a problem in and of itself. The main problem with *Shaolin Drunk Fighter* is that the two major sources of inspiration never gel with each other. The whole Japanese samurai subplot is ultimately superfluous, especially since Lu Shing Yi Pu doesn't have anything to do in the film after his brief duel with a Shaolin monk. Had he gotten involved during the climax that at least would've justified his inclusion in the film. Nor does the subplot involving Lu Shing's sister go anywhere. After she and Huang have a brief "comic" fight following the latter catching the former taking a bath, the movie sets up a possible romantic subplot, with her coming to visit Huang several times at the Temple. But since the two never meet up while he's at the temple, the whole exercise becomes rather pointless.

Arguably more pointless than those two characters are the ninja that show up midway through the film. It's pretty coincidental that a bunch of disaffected Japanese *shinobi* would show up in China and offer their services to an evil warlord...wait a minute, that happened in the lauded, overrated *Swordsman II*, didn't it? Nonetheless, those ninja represented the best part of the film, as we get to see them disappear in the blink of an eye, explode in a puff of smoke whenever a character is about to deliver the death blow to them, and burrow under the ground as if they

had forgotten to take the left turn at Albuquerque. The anemic and clumsy fight choreography actually comes alive whenever they're on the screen, which is a testament to the saving power of the ninja.

The rest of the fights are okay at best, which is sad, considering the talent involved (in front of the camera; I have no idea who action director Wong Chi Cheng is and I couldn't find an entry for him at the HKMDB, so I don't know what else he worked on). The gratuitous Shaolin training scenes are proof that the characters know what they're doing, fight-wise. Unfortunately, the fights tend to be sloppy, simple, and it almost feels like the players are staggering through the choreographed routines. It's pretty sad. We do get more weapons on display in this film than we tend to in other films involving drunken boxing, but that's more due to the *Shaolin Temple* roots in this exercise. I will point out, however, that the action does pick up in the final duel against Hau Chiu-Sing, where Jacky Liu gets to perform some drunken pole *and* extensively use the rope-dart, which he looks good at doing. I'll have to check my notes, but it's actually one of the better rope-dart fights I've seen, to be honest. It's a shame the rest of the action was so uninspired.

When all is said and done, you're really better off watching *Shaolin Temple* and *Duel to the Death* than this film. It doesn't deserve to be ranked (or even compared to) with *Drunken Master*, because it's really not in the same ballpark. It operates under completely different genre assumptions than Jackie Chan's hit. But if you insist in me comparing them, let's just say that Jacky has nothing, and I mean *nothing*, on Jackie, if you catch my drift.

**Shaolin Drunk Monk (Taiwan/South Korea, 1982: Chin Yue-Sang) - (aka The Drunken Monk; Drunken Martial Arts; The 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber: the Final Encounter)** - *Shaolin Drunk Monk* is, from what I can gather, a Taiwanese-South Korean co-production. I'd say about half, if not more, of the cast is Korean, with the main exceptions being Gordon Liu and Chin Yuet-Sang (*Buddha Assassinator* and *Lady Whirlwind*), the latter serving as the film's main choreographer. Director Ulysses Au worked on a few important kung fu films in Taiwan during the 1970s, mainly *The Secret of Shaolin Poles* and *Young Hero from Shaolin*, both of which were films about Chinese folk hero Fong Sai Yuk. Ulysses Au had worked with co-action director Lau Kar-Leung on *Secret of Shaolin Poles*, which I still have to see.

It's a bit of a disappointment that all this talent couldn't make a better all-around film. With Lau Kar-Leung's involvement, probably as a consultant, the quality of the *hung gar* that Gordon Liu performs is of a uniformly high-quality. The presence of Eagle Han Ying (*Shaolin Drunken Monkey* and *North Shaolin vs. South Shaolin*) also guarantees us some good mantis fist and kicking. It just never really comes together. It doesn't help that the drunken boxing as implied in the title comes in rather short supply.

The plot is typical kung fu fare. There's a kung fu clan known as the "Big Mantis Clan" that's headed by Wong Kin-Chung (Eagle Han Ying). He's a bit dismayed at the fact that members of his clan are being mysteriously beaten up and killed by some guys walking around wearing huge straw hats. On one particular occasion, he receives a note letting him know that his daughter (Chang Mi-Hee, *Even the Sun is Sobbing*) is going to be next. And what do you know, she *is*!

Apparently there are two culprits behind the assaults on the Big Mantis Clan members. The first is a one-armed boxer (Hyeon Kil-Su, who'd later show up in *Shaolin Drunk Monk*), apparently the victim of Wong Kin-Chung following the latter's ascent to power in the clan. The second is a bald fellow named Lau Chung (Gordon Liu), who's actually the son of the ex-Clan Leader. Both of them are working on their own, although they eventually start helping each other knock off the remaining members of the Big Mantis Clan.

While this is going on, Wong's daughter remains Lau Chung's prisoner, that is, until she finds out who he really is. Apparently the two were childhood friends and as soon as she knows who the guy holding her captive is, she goes all moist between the legs (and not because she's peeing her pants, although she does do that, too). So yeah, we do get to witness a love scene between Gordon Liu and Chang Mi-Hee, although I'm not sure who out there really wanted to see it. It comes across as being a more uncomfortable affair for the latter, although I'll refrain from making crude remarks as to why. Also of note regarding this subplot is the scene where the daughter is trying to decide between honoring her father and going after Lau Chung, which is filled with inexplicable changes in scenery and clothing, as if the daughter were taking several days to decide. It's a really bizarre scene.

Obviously, once it's time for Lau Chung to take on the person responsible for his dad's death and his mother's suicide, he'll have to decide between his lover and his thirst for revenge.

If it seems like I don't want to talk about this film's plot, it's probably because there's simply less plot to talk about than usual. The movie is divided into three acts: the first act being the initial attacks on the Big Mantis Clan and the daughter's kidnapping. The second act is an overlong flashback sequence that shows Wong Kin-Chung's rise to power and Lau Chung's subsequent training with a drunken master. I'll note here that there's absolutely no chemistry here between Lau Chung and the master, which is a near-death sentence for this type of movie. Whether it's a surrogate father-son relationship or a two-strong-personalities-clashing one, there has to be some sort connection between the master and student. In this film, Lau Chung gets trained by some random drunken master in a flashback, who's never mentioned again for the rest of movie's running time.



Despite the title and Gordon Liu's trademark bald appearance, there really isn't a Shaolin drunk monk to be seen in it. Gordon's teacher is a drunk, but he's not a Shaolin monk. Gordon Liu looks like a monk, but he doesn't study at Shaolin, nor is he drunk when he's performing drunken boxing. Truth to be told, *Shaolin Drunk Monk* would've been better suited for *Shaolin Drunk Fighter* than for this film.

The training scenes in this movie range from horribly mundane to sort-of interesting. There are long, LONG shots of Gordon Liu carrying buckets of water and preparing stoves and whatnot. I assume it's meant to show him developing his physique through menial tasks, but it's really just boring stuff. Watching him perform *hung gar's* drunken techniques while standing on chairs and catching wet chairs hurled at him is a bit more interesting. Although most of the training we see has Gordon honing his *jui kuen* skills, most of his actual fighting is based on *hung gar's* Five Animals technique, which we never see him practicing.

The actual action is actually pretty good, if ultimately forgettable. Chin Yuet-Sang, who worked on a lot of late 1970s films like *Dance of the Drunken Mantis* and *Buddha Assassinator*, is responsible for the bulk of the action choreography. He also shows up in a supporting role as a ninja working in the employ of Eagle Han Ying's character. His use of the chain whip—which he also did in *Lion vs. Lion*—is one of the action highlights. He has the benefit of working with a bunch of Korean actors, most of whom are *tae kwon do* stylists, and thus we get a lot of solid kicking in the fights. Nothing here reaches the level of Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee, but it's good enough.

Gordon Liu stands out, as is expected. Whenever Lau Kar-Leung and Gordon Liu work together, one can usually expect good results. I'm sure Lau Kar-Leung hung out on set mainly to make sure that the *hung gar* that Liu performs in his fight scenes was reasonably accurate to the actual style. Liu's drunken boxing is a lot more accomplished here than it was in *Heroes of the East*, which seemed a bit stiff (not to mention shoehorned into the film because of the then-recent success of *Drunken Master*). It's certainly miles ahead of Meng Fei's drunken technique in *Kung Fu of Eight Drunkards*. I bring up Meng Fei because Meng also had a solid background in Southern kung fu styles, as opposed to the more acrobatic Peking Opera theatrics. Where Meng Fei was incredibly rigid and slow, Gordon is quick and supple, if not mind-bendingly flexible. The highlight of his showcase is that makes better use of the Angel Ho technique than Jackie Chan did in the first *Drunken Master*. If you pay close enough attention, some of the moves that Gordon does while imitating Miss Ho were re-used by Lau Kar-Leung when choreographing Jackie Chan in *Drunken Master 2*. The main problem is that Liu only uses it briefly in a fight against Chin Yuet-Sang and then at the very end of the final duel. That simply isn't enough.

The other action highlight is Eagle Han Ying. Once more, Eagle uses the mantis style as a compliment to his *tae kwon do*. He did the same thing in *Death Duel of Kung Fu*, where he fought against John Liu and Don Wong Tao. Interestingly enough, Chin Yuet-Sang did the choreography for *that* film, too. There is a nice flying bicycle kick that Eagle Han uses here. It's a shame that Eagle Han doesn't get to fight more in this, since his high-kicking mantis is a joy to watch. The final fights are easily the best the film has to offer, no doubt about that. Watch for the subtitles that identify the locale of the final duels as being in Pakistan (!).

*Shaolin Drunk Monk* is just kind of there. The action is good; the rest is a bit dry. That puts it a notch above *Kung Fu of Eight Drunkards*, but one below *World of the Drunken Master*. From the point of view of the technique, it's worth it to get idea of what a more authentic portrayal of the technique might look like. From a purist's perspective, it's worth it for that. Just don't expect good cinema to accompany it.

**Shaolin Ex Monk (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung San-Yee)** - Quite disgustingly transparent with its intentions, part of *Shaolin Ex Monk* is a gloriously failed Jackie Chan imitator starring Blacky Ko (who was never a good kung fu comedy lead. Would work better in gangster roles) with light shenanigans set to Warner Brothers cartoon music and none of it works. When bringing in other familiarity such as when John Liu's character trains's Blacky, *Shaolin Ex Monk* starts to click as Liu brings charisma and trademark kicking to the picture. Traditional action therefore comes alive but it's the more wire enhanced aspects that entertains more as Liu's characters begins unveiling a mystery surrounding a masked ninja and several murders. It's not a plot we keep up with but overall *Shaolin Ex Monk* has its share of eye brow raising moments and truthfully, it's almost all due to Liu's solid presence regardless of what he's doing. Also with Jack Long.

**Shaolin Handlock (Hong Kong, 1979: Ho Meng Hua)** - Quite removed from the usual big budget epics in which David Chiang usually appeared for Shaw's, '*Shaolin Handlock*' is a film on a scale more usually associated with independent studios. That doesn't make it any less enjoyable however and while it won't be regarded as a classic it certainly serves as a competent kung fu film.

When his father is murdered, David Chiang travels to Thailand to track down the gang boss responsible for ordering the hit. As the title would suggest, the '*Shaolin Handlock*' technique, which looks more like a headlock executed

from behind the victim, is the cornerstone technique of David's kung fu style. Unfortunately the villain (obviously it's Lo Lieh) has developed a counter technique that forces David to rethink his strategy.

Although based around a very simple revenge story, Ho Meng Hua somehow manages to maintain the pace for the full 90 minutes filling the film with intrigue and interesting characters. The fight choreography is well executed and the 'fight to plot ratio' is well balanced. A final showdown featuring mainly hand based fighting plays to the strengths of Lo Lieh and David Chiang (them being non martial artists and all) but also has a great performance from Chan Wai Man; while he might not be as graceful as some of the opera trained stars, it's hard not to appreciate the fact that he really could fight for real..

**Shaolin Hero (Taiwan, 1982: Wang Yue) - aka Avenging Eagle; Great Massacre** - I spent the first hour or so a little confused as the plot didn't really seem to flow particularly well. Actually it made no sense at all.

It begins with Leung Kar Yan rescuing a young girl from three brigands; making good use of his spear technique (the spear being his weapon of choice for this film). Cut to a woman being kidnapped while taking a bath; her attackers trapping her in the bathtub and carrying her in it. Cut again to wandering swordsman Meng Fei who, after a series of duels, meets up with the bathtub girl with who, it seems, he has a bit of a thing going.

The one thing that does make sense throughout all of this is that someone is going round killing all rival warriors to gain dominance of the 'martial world'. In general though the whole thing is nonsense and suffers from one of the worst dub jobs I've come across. Unemotional tones can really make these films a trial sometimes. There are some real clunkers like :

*I'm not an easy person to kill and even though I'm not such a good warrior, you can't defeat me*

*When put under any pressure at all, I make a point of doing what I'm told*

*You'll be surprised to hear that our organisation is a type of orthodox semi religious group and I have no idea how many members it has got*

All of these are lines taken from fight scenes !!!!

And despite the dubbing, it doesn't take an expert to spot terrible acting.

The film does feature some very well constructed action sequences initially focussing on Meng Fei's character with some impressive swordplay scenes while Leung Kar Yan appears at the end with his big spear. In between though the film seems to spend far too much time on the marital problems of the two main leads and tends to get bogged down a bit.

When Meng Fei and Leung Kar Yan finally fight each other (they're love rivals as it turns out) it actually gets pretty good although that particular scene is a bit short. There's also a great ending with Leung Kar Yan and Meng Fei uniting to fight Philip Ko Fei and his henchmen. The sequence is nicely filmed with effective use of fast editing. It still doesn't make up for the senseless plot and crap dialogue though.

Spoiler Alert

Leung Kar Yan's final words in the film to a mortally wounded Meng Fei : "We were never friends before this but now in this tragedy.....we are close" (way to downplay the situation, jeez)

Meng Fei replies : ...uuhhh....

The end

Classic

**Shaolin Intruders (Hong Kong, 1983: Tong Gaai)** - After Ye Qinghua (Lau Yuk-Pok) is framed for murder, her friends Lei Xun(Derek Yee) and Qiao Yiduo (Jason Pai Piao) try to help clear her name. All evidence points to the monks of Shaolin, but to enter the temple and further their investigation, they must pass three challenges from the monks!

The story starts off pretty interesting, with a very "detective-like" feel to it. Unfortunately, much of the mystery is done away with very early on as it is basically established that it is definitely a group of monks that did it. The question of which monk(s) is still in the air, but once the action comes rolling in, the plot takes a backseat, and that's ok with this one. There is a flashback scene during the conclusion that is meant to build background for some of the characters. While said flashback achieved that, it made the characters seem much more unbelievable, for lack of a better word.. I'd like to avoid spoilers, so to explain what I mean by that for those that have seen it: how did this guy become a highly ranked monk?! Even though I wish that it stuck more to the detective narrative it seemed headed

for in the beginning; The movie still has a decent story with a couple twists and turns in it, aided by some good acting and characters.

The acting is really good overall, even from said characters whose personalities contradict their standing. A perfect example of this is Lee Hoi San, he plays the abbot in charge of disciplining monks who do wrong.. Here's the catch - he is extremely hot-headed, and seemingly sorely lacks discipline himself! I'm not sure if this was done on purpose for comedy, but I found it a strange choice.. Anyway, given the role he was, he does a great job with it, and is very convincing when he gets pissed off! Other standouts are Phillip Ko as another abbot and Jason Pai Piao, who is easily my favorite character in the movie. Very charismatic performance, and provides some comic relief as well. Derek Yee is the main star, and while he doesn't do a great job acting, he does better than usual.

Onto the action, what this film is really all about! The fights are very good all around, I believe they're all weapons based, and mainly swords and staves. This movie has the best "one vs. many" fights of any classic martial arts movie I can think of. You won't see any extras dancing back and forth in the background in this one! Tong Gai would get my props if it were just for that and the exceptional grounded work in the movie.. But the real standout action scenes are the "Lohan Monk Formation" set pieces. Some really amazing stunts here, the wire-work is fantastic for any time, let alone when this movie was made. I won't go into detail about the scene(s) I am talking about, so if you haven't seen it you can see them for yourself! All of the fighting cast looked good, and no one really stood out in particular to me.

This movie takes place almost exclusively in indoor "temple" themed sets.. While the sets are of course fantastic, it would have been nice to see a bigger variety, like in Shaolin Prince.

Of Tong Gai's directed films I have seen, I prefer Shaolin Prince to this. "Prince" just feels more fleshed out and well done overall. With that said, Intruders has the edge in action for sure, and there is nothing I've seen like some of the action scenes in this movie. "Shaolin Intruders" has its problems with the narrative and characters; but the fantastic action, one of a kind stunts, strong cast and acting more than make up for it.

Great movie.

**Shaolin Invincible Guys (Taiwan, 1978: Raymond Lui) – aka Shaolin Deadly Hands** - This movie is much better than its goofy generic name would indicate. Indie starring (and directed by) Raymond Lui and Chi Kuan Chun. The story, plot, and acting are all really good for an independant kung fu movie (and something a little different). There isn't much action in the middle of it, but you care enough about the characters to where that doesn't matter. Unfortunately, the ending is pretty weak in typical kung fu fashion, as good as the plot leading up to it is.

The fights in this movie are very good, and Chi Kuan Chun stands out. Very good shapes (but not the fancy kind), the skirmishes between CKC and Raymond Lui in particular were great. I don't recognize Raymond Lui, but he seems to be a solid screen fighter with decent kicking ability. There is a great scrap between CKC and the main baddie at the end as well. (Man Kong Lung?)

I went in with low expectations and was pleasantly surprised. Good plot, good fighting, can't ask for too much more. This is the first indie with CKC I've seen, and I am already liking him more. This doesn't even seem to be one of the highly regarded ones, so I am definitely interested in exploring this part of his career more. I'll have to pay more attention to him in the Shaws as well, maybe he was just outshined by the other stars? (As most of what I've seen him in is in ensemble casts)

**Shaolin Invincible Sticks (Taiwan, 1978: Lee Tso-Nam)** - I've talked about this briefly in other reviews, but I'll repeat again that one of the best things to happen to Taiwanese martial arts cinema was director Lee Tso-Nam. Mr. Lee has a very strong reputation among of traditional kung fu films for making very entertaining films on the cheap, combining stellar choreography with solid casts and, often, with good stories. Sometimes Lee Tso-Nam chose to walk down the already-trodden path of films about rival schools and styles, changing or including enough details to make it look at least a little fresh; other times he made his kung fu movies as period-piece crime thrillers, where the characters happened to solve their differences using kung fu.

Shaolin Invincible Sticks falls in the former category; this is a pure kung fu movie for people who appreciate pure kung fu. The story is old school and the premise expects the viewer to swallow two important points: the first one, a

common trope of the genre, is that a kung fu master can wander around the countryside, killing dozens of rivals in unfair duels without the intervention of the law. The second one, which is even more hard to swallow to anyone who is familiar the diversity of martial arts styles in China, is that, within a limited geographical area, there could be not one, not two, but many schools dedicated to teaching fighting styles based on a single weapon, in this case, the pole/stick/staff/whatever. If you can suspend disbelief on these two facts, giving Lee Tso-Nam the benefit of the doubt in that he was trying to make a Lau Kar-Leung-esque meditation on a specific fighting style (or weapons style), then you have a fairly entertaining kung fu movie on your hands.

The story, such as it is, deals with the exploits (or misadventures) of a certain young pole fighter named Ku Yung (Don Wong Tao, *Challenge of Death* and *Slaughter in San Francisco*). Ku Yung is the sort of "heir" to a special, all-powerful pole and the accompanying technique to use it, but instead of spending his days practicing to be an all-around bad-a\*\*, he wastes his time gambling and flirting with girls, getting into the occasional street fight. This earns him the ire of his three uncles, who challenge him to a duel. When he loses, he's kicked off the family property and practically becomes a pauper.

Meanwhile, another pole fighter named Lu Tai-Yeh (Chang Yi, *Fatal Needles and Flying Fists* and *Super Manchu*) is trying to prove to everyone that he's the best stick fighter in the country. To this end, he goes around challenging fellow stick masters to duels and killing them. Actually, what he does is have his two assistants fight first, who are usually able to kill their opponents via treacherous means. If it looks like that the fighter in question is too good to be defeated by them, Lu jumps in and makes short work of the guy. I'm no expert in martial honor, but proving you're the best by winning unfairly seems to defeat the whole point of the exercise.

So Ku Yung is wandering around trying to survive. He comes across a large fellow, Tai (Kam Kong, *A Girl Called Tigress* and *Master of the Flying Guillotine*), who is also a pole fighter and the survivor of an attack by Lu Tai-Yeh earlier in the film. After a brief fight between the two, they become friends and Tai tells Ku Yung that they should visit his uncle so Ku Yung can resume his training.

They meet up with Tai's uncle, an old man, who's an expert at convincing everybody around him that he's a kung fu master despite the fact that really don't see him fight during the entire film. The man has a daughter, Yu Yu (Hsia Kwan-Li, *Woman Avenger* and *The Leg Fighters*), a beautiful kung fu fighter who has attracted the unwanted attention of the annoying son of a local stick fighter. Although she's able to handle herself in a fight, she eventually gets kidnapped by the idiot's father who wants to force her to marry his worthless son. As beautiful as Hsia Kwan Li is, and she's a looker, I can't imagine what an annoying, effeminate, girly man like that guy could want with a wife like her. She could own him in a fight with her eyes closed and, not demonstrating any sort of quality of value, the guy would probably be consigning himself to a lifetime of spousal abuse at her hands.

Anyways, Ku Yung, Tai, and the girl's father go to the rival school and Ku Yung to challenge the master. Ku Yung takes up the challenge and is able to win, beating the master in front of his students. As the students believe that Ku Yung was the student of the old bluffer, they all leave the master's school and go to study with Yu Yu's father. Ku Yung and Tai, after getting in an argument with Yu Yu's mother, leave the school and go to work at a local inn/restaurant.

Unfortunately, the fame of Yu Yu's father attracts the attention of Lu Tai-Yeh, who shows up and kills the old man and Tai in a bloody duel. Ku Yung and Yu Yu flee. Lu Tai-Yeh also eventually finds his way to the house where Ku Yung's uncles live and kills two of them, leaving only one alive. At this point, Ku Yung must train himself for the eventual showdown with Lu Tai-Yeh.

From a story point of view, there's not much to set this film apart from others of its ilk (*Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, for example) save for the aforementioned fact that every single martial artist in this film is a pole fighter of some sorts. That in and of itself makes this movie more valuable to the more devoted chopsokey fan than to the layman, who might get board from watching people beat each other with sticks for 90 minutes. I have no problem with this, to be honest, especially considering that this is a movie that I had wanted to see for the express purpose of seeing how it would treat its premise.

Being a kung fu movie made after 1978, you can expect a fair amount of KOMEDY to be supplied by the supporting actors. Most of the odious comic relief comes from Hsia Kwan-Li's annoying and effeminate suitor, who actually doesn't die, even when Chang Yi and his men kill his dad right in front of him. Chang Yi, you could've made yourself a sympathetic villain by removing that irritating little jerk from the gene pool. But you didn't, so Don Wong Tao had every right to kill you in the final duel. That said, there's quite a bit of comedy to be derived from the dubbing, as we get lots and lots of dialogue from the males characters droning on and on about how long and powerful and hard their sticks are. I suppose the only film that could beat that is *Peculiar Tricks and the Boxing Master*, which, according to my friend Dave Thomas, has a cockfighting subplot and thus lots of scenes of the actors talking about how powerful their cocks are.

Being a Lee Tso-Nam movie starring the dynamic duo of Don Wong Tao and Chang Yi, you can expect a solid amount of quality action in this film. As I said before, practically all of the action is relegated to pole fighting, although we do get the occasional open-handed fight, mainly from Hsia Kwan-Li, who briefly gets to show off her flexibility early on. The action chores are handled by Taiwanese choreography powerhouse Tommy Lee, who doesn't quite reach the level of attained by Lau Kar-Leung and Sammo Hung, but still shows himself to be one of the more talented Taiwanese action directors out there. Most of the variety can be seen in the types of sticks being used: regular poles; short, thick poles; long, whip-like poles; twin short sticks; stick and rattan shield combinations; etc. The main complaint I've seen of this film is that the final fight is too short—it lasts about 3-4 minutes, which is very short by old school fight standards. It's still a solid fight, just like all of the others in the film, so no complaints there.

*Shaolin Invincible Sticks* should find its audience among fans of Don Wong Tao, Lee Tso-Nam movies, kung fu movie purists, and some more serious-minded martial artists, who might glean a lesson or two in stick fighting from this film. Heck, even the more casual fans of kung fu movies or B-movie fans who like a bit of unintentional humor in their chopsokey films will definitely find something to enjoy here. It's not the best movie that these people have made together, but it's a fairly solid one.

**Shaolin Invincibles, The (Taiwan, 1977: Hou Cheng)** - Deadly serious period matters here, dealing with a tyrant king, tragedy, martial arts training at the Shaolin temple and an adulthood path of revenge for two sisters (Doris Lung & Chia Ling). Well costumed, low-budget Taiwanese yaaaaaawn had it not been for the bright and now legendary idea of spicing up the deadly serious with Chen Hung-Lieh's king having gorillas as bodyguards. Obviously stuntmen in suits, they only have one weak spot, know kung-fu and director Hou Cheng clearly is inspired whenever occupied with these sections. The energy is up, the FUN is increased considerably as no one is in it for the drama. The extensive kung fu scene between the ladies and the gorillas is wonderful, fast paced and really the final 20 minutes is a fireworks display of an odd idea gone very right. Jack Long appears briefly as a surprise fighter sporting a HUGE eye, Dorian Tan appears late in an forgettable role and Carter Wong fights two wizards (one being Blacky Ko) with long tongues. Reefer madness but fun for all.

**Shaolin Iron Claws (Taiwan, 1979: Ko Shih Hou)** - Two policemen discover a document detailing a plot to overthrow the republic and re-instate the Manchus and set out to thwart the plan. Numerous attempts to retrieve the document provide for a regular stream of fight scenes and there's also a bit of intrigue as a masked man is running around killing anybody who uncovers the plot. The identity of the masked man isn't really a surprise as there are one or two pointers throughout the film that only the most attention-deficient would fail to spot.

Wong Tao delivers an excellent performance in stylish fight scenes that give him the chance to show off some flashy kicks as well as the solid hand techniques that are usually features of his 'southern fist' fighter roles. Peter Chen doubles for the more acrobatic moves and it's a little obvious due to the height difference. Speaking of Peter Chen, he has done a great job as fight choreographer with sequences that are varied and fast paced.

Wong Tao gets the lions share of the fight action with Lee Yi Min's scenes being a case of quality over quantity. When he finally does let rip, Lee Yi Min is quite dazzling with amazing timing and agility. His fight against four spear fighters is a real showstopper where the margin for error (and injury) looks incredibly slight.

**Shaolin Kids, The (Taiwan, 1977: Joseph Kuo) - aka Shaolin Posse** - Your basic early kung fu film that more often than not revolve in one way or another around revenge. My main interest in this film was to see one of the early female fighting pioneers in HK films - the Taiwanese actress, Polly Shang Kwan. A high-ranking minister to the Emperor poisons her father and as he lies dying he writes on Polly's hand in blood to save the Emperor from this traitor and to gain revenge. She along with Carter Wong and some Shaolin priests do this. Some good action in that old kung fu style that at times seems almost in slow motion compared to the action in later HK films. Polly is fairly impressive though as she fights most often with two short swords.

**Shaolin King Boxer (Hong Kong, 1979: Karl Maka) - aka Iron Fists** - A criminal (Lau Kar Wing) is broken out of jail by his allies (Leung Kar Yan, Wilson Tong) while the police chief (Chen Kuan Tai) visits his family. Seeking revenge, Lau Kar Wing and his partners in crime kill Chen Kuan Tai's whole family and cut off his thumb. Rather than kill him, they

allow him to escape. Angered and seeking revenge, Chen Kuan Tai arms himself with an iron fist, and allies himself with a mysterious bounty hunter (Meng Fei) while they investigate the whereabouts of Lau Kar Wing and his posse.

I was fairly surprised when I heard that Karl Maka directed this one. For those of you who don't know, Karl Maka is a comedian who is responsible for films like Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog and Odd Couple. However, this tale is quite dark, proving that he is not a 1 dimensional director. The best thing about this movie is definitely the cast, starring 3 of my all-time kung fu favs: Leung Kar Yan, Lau Kar Wing and Chen Kuan Tai. All of them are great in it too. The story is intriguing, aside from CKT's obvious thirst for revenge. Maka's characters each have their own ulterior motives, as you will find out if you watch this film. For a film made at this time (76 I believe), the action is exceptional, and the pacing is excellent as well. Overall, a very good movie.

Only about 2% comedy in this one. This film is very gritty and dark, so do not expect much in the way of comedy. All the comedy comes from one character, who only appears briefly. So for all you comedy-haters, this is good news. In fact, I won't even call it comedy, I'll call it more "lighthearted moments".

Quite impressive. The first fights begin a bit slow, but pick up from the middle onwards. Nice long exchanges, with some really impressive weapon work. Lau Kar Wing really proves his skills are just as good as his big-time bro, Lau Kar Leung. For a film made in 1976, very impressive choreography. Meng Fei's fan-fighting skills are really something.

Bloodier than the average kung fu movie, that's for sure. Not Chang Cheh bloody, but bloody at some points. Internal bleeding, a thumb decapitation, but in particular, the deathtraps found in the ending. Overall, isn't loaded with blood, but there is a relative amount.

This one goes to Chen Kuan Tai and Lau Kar Wing. why? CKT's moves look great as usual, but he's soooooo badass with that iron fist! His acting skills are great as usual as well. Lau Kar Wing makes a great villain, and he really gets to show off his broadsword skills, as well as choreography skills.

This movie is a worth buying for big fans of the 5 main stars, or big fans of classic kung fu in general. Casual fans may want to rent it first to see how they like it.

**Shaolin Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1974: Joseph Kuo)** - A young rickshaw driver is bullied by his rivals, but under oath from his mother he restrains from fighting back. However, he is pushed to the limit when his sister is raped and using his lethal Shaolin Kung Fu skills he sets out on a path of bloody vengeance.

All China Kung Fu champion Wen Chiang Long stars as rickshaw driver Lin Fung, in this average Joseph Kuo produced basher. The DVD cover kinda gets the plot right but they have made some mistakes. The villains attempt to rape his blind wife not his sister. He also interrupts them before anything bad happens. He kills one of the thugs who just happens to be the local gangsters son. You can pretty much guess the rest.

This film was made by the Hong Hwa film studio. You can spot some of the usual Hong Kong locations. The brick kiln location that appears heavily in Iron Ox The Tigers Killer also gets used here. Some of the same actors also appear in this film playing heavies. Sometimes the setting for the scenes are more interesting than the performances. This is not one of the best Martial Arts films I've watched but it's still far from the worst too.

Shaolin Kung Fu features the standard basher style staged by Ho Ming Liang. Real life Martial Artist Wen Chiang Long shows potential but the fights don't really display his skills that well. Saying that there are a few standout moves and he performs some nice kicks. The film also has a few fantasy elements but there's no wire work. Our hero sometimes displays super human abilities such as leaping over lakes. The final moments of the one and one finale are pretty funny and not in an intentional way. Saying that, it is a pretty unique end to a fight that I've never seen before. I don't want to go into details for anyone who hasn't viewed this movie yet.

**Shaolin Kung Fu Master (Taiwan, 1978: Wong Fei-Lung)** – aka **The Five Invincible Guards** - A great opening to this one. Wong Goon Hung is walking over a hill. Then we see Lung Fei walking towards him. They stop, and they take a very long look at each other in silence. And the fight begins. But then it's just a normal, good kung fu fight. A bit of a let down.

This is a sort of interesting kung fu mystery with a lot of good fights. It has a star studded cast, but Wong Tao, Chi Kuan Chun, Wong Chi Sang and Tsui Hung just have cameo fighting roles, with Wong Tao's being the highlight. Wong Goon Hung is the leading man, Chung Wa has a non fighting role, and Tsang Chiu plays Wong Goon Hung's

sidekick. The villains are not very well known. Siu Wong Lung and Cliff Ching Ching play a big man little man duo. There's plenty of intricate choreography in their fights and it is a highlight in their careers. Cheung Paang has a good villain role. The main villain is Chang Yi. It's a bit of a mystery, but they don't try to hide it. All of the bad guys are revealed early on. Chang Yi has a nice fight with Wong Goon Hung near the end of the movie and WGH gets defeated easily by snake fist. But Chang Yi lets him go. This was pretty cool I thought. We don't know much about the villain, but now we know that he is confident, he's a badass, he probably beats everybody easily, and he's hoping that WGH can come back and give him a challenge. It leads to a training scene where WGH has a bunch of snakes around him, and he catches them with his hands. This is insane, and quite a thrill to watch.

The final fight is a good one, but not one that you will be rushing to watch again.

**Shaolin Kung fu Mystagogue (Taiwan, 1976: Chang Pei-I) – aka Killer Fist; Wu Tang Mystagogue; Shaolin Zen**

**Master** - In order to help the Ming Prince King Tang (Kong Ban) to escape from the Ching, Xu Feng and some followers disguise as commoners and go to a town where they want to seek refuge in the shaolin temple. Unfortunately, they are attacked by the Ching's men and Xu Feng is hurt, while Kong Ban is arrested by the Ching officers without knowing that he is the prince. Xu Feng goes to the temple where his brother (Carter Wong) is studying kung fu and they go to the prison in order to help Kong Ban to escape. In each of their attempts, they are attacked by Chang Yi, who is working for the Ching prince and was an ancient student of the elder of the shaolin temple. What a superb action movie, with inventive weapons, double spies, very good fights and excellent plot. Watch it with confidence !

**Shaolin Legend (Taiwan, 1981: Wong Wai-Lam) aka Abbot White** - A child disciple unleashes the spirit of an evil monk named Devil Claw and is immediately possessed. After he grows up, he seeks the men that imprisoned him and kills them off one by one. Soon though, the possessing spirit and the mind of the original man are battling for control of the body. With detachable limbs and unearthly fighting abilities, it seems that the only way to defeat him is from the inside.

This is another example of what could have been a decent film in its original form (much like previously reviewed Silver Spear) made nearly unwatchable by the transfer and dubbing. Based on the number of characters and what seems to be a major back story, I have to assume this is based on a wuxia novel, but the either the film is severely cut or the director decided to only focus on the latter part. Entire plot lines and characters appear and disappear with no explanation, making the story impossible to follow. There are certainly some cool fights, with Devil Claw being able to shoot his limbs like spears and become a ghost at will. The choreography is well done as well, what can be seen of it. Unfortunately, the quality of the DVD release sends the film to the trash heap. As mentioned on many other sites, the dubbing is awful, with voice actors whose first language is clearly not English, making it almost impossible to figure out what is going on. I'm not sure what the point of this was, other than trying to fool people into thinking the audio track is the original. They clearly should have done a better job though, as you can hear the original Mandarin pop in every time someone speaks abruptly, then quickly fading out as if the dubbers were manually controlling the volume of the original film as they were recording their own. What a hack job! Pair that with full screen cropping that eliminates nearly half the picture and you get a complete disappointment. If I can ever see the film in its original form, I'll revisit the review for an update.

**Shaolin Mantis (Hong Kong, 1978: Lau Kar-Leung) – aka The Deadly Mantis** - Another winner from Lau Kar Leung in every way: director, stunning choreography and characters you like / hate all wrapped up in a neat conspiracy plot that eventually gets to the creation of the title kung fu.

Scholar / Martial Artist Wai Fung (David Chiang) is summoned by the Emperor to infiltrate the anti-Imperial Tien family. Wai must return with evidence of the Tien's plot within a certain timespan or Wai's family will suffer imprisonment and ultimately death. Wai works his way into the Tien clan by offering to teach the granddaughter (Cecelia Wong) of Master Tien. Grandpa Tien (Lau Kar Wing) never quite trusts the young teacher (the only youthful tutor his granddaughter has had), nor do the other men of the Tien household. Wai is told he cannot leave the Tien home. When the young scholar tries to leave, Grandfather Tien wants the young scholars' head, but his granddaughter has other ideas, she marries Wai Fung unaware of his intentions or martial skills.

Another attempt to leave results in a harrowing escape. Wai and his wife have to fight through five tests (each of the remaining family members.) It is only then the family discovers Wai is an excellent fighter. Wai's freedom comes with a heavy price.

It's here, two thirds of the way into the movie that Wai invents Mantis kung fu.

After creating the Mantis style, Wai Fung returns to the Tien household under the guise of revenge to secretly secure evidence. He must once again fight against each member of the household before he can get to Master Tien and the evidence.

Animal Style on display: After Wai's initial escape, he stumbles across a praying mantis and in turn develops this well known kung fu style. Lau Kar Leung's inventive training sequences involve the strengthening of the wrists, hands and forearms through the use of poles and other objects. The speed of the insect is easily replicated as you see the creation of the grappling and hooking movements which make Mantis such a recognizable style of Kung Fu.

Chiang is a delight to watch as he mimics the mantis' movements. An additional fun element is seeing how he figures out to defeat each member of the Tien family with his newly created fight style. On a cinematography note, I love the use of shadow to convey the Mantis style, it evokes the insects' own grappling techniques and adds a kind of surreal flourish to Chiang's martial performances.

For this film, Pops also created a style for Grandpa Tien called Shadow and Object which acts as a kind of anti-Mantis style: pressing, entangling, and deflecting an opponents arms as a way to ultimately crush the adversary's ribcage. Wing -who cornered the market in playing older masters- is particularly menacing here.

I haven't mentioned Wilson Tong, Lily Li or Norman Chu yet (they play Tien's sons and daughter respectively), but they are given very little to do until they have to fight Wai Fung. They all have some nice moments.

The movie's ending pissed me off the first time I watched, but upon subsequent viewings I realized what was really going on. I won't spoil it, but it's an excellent twist and sadly ironic. Screenwriter Szeto-An wrote a very family-centric story with a neat conspiracy twist. If you can sit tight for the kung fu and like a good story, you'll enjoy *Shaolin Mantis*.

**Shaolin Martial Arts (Taiwan, 1974: Chang Cheh)** - In this Chang Cheh classic (with choreography by Lau Kar Leung and Tong Gaai), we see the "Shaolin vs Qing" plot again. Here, a Qing leader (good ol' Kong Do as yet another rotten bastard he plays so well) causes trouble during a celebration, which leads to a fight breaking out between Shaolin disciples and Qings, and the Qings revealing they hired two highly skilled fighters to take on the Shaolin students: one (Leung Kar Yang AKA Beady, in his very first movie appearance - and he does NOT sport a beard here) uses the Steel Armor and the other (Wang Lung Wei) Qi Dong. Following a slaughter where a lot of people from Shaolin were killed, the remaining few go to their master who discusses the notable weaknesses of the Qing champions. This leads to two Shaolin disciples (Gordon Liu and Bruce Tong) going out and learning Rolling Eagle Claw (to kick the weak spot of a Steel Armor practitioner - namely his groin) and Eagle Claw (as Qi Dong can be affected by finger-based attacks). Following their training, they go fight but it turns out the Manchu champions are stronger than expected and our two Shaolin meet a grim fate (after what I consider one of the greatest fight scenes I've seen in any movie). Following this and a Manchu raid where next to everybody in the Shaolin camp is slaughtered, the two remaining students (Fu Sheng and Chi Kuan Chun) go find the teachers the master wanted to send them to. CKC is to learn Wing Chun, a style based on short powerful strikes (since Qi Dong is immune to all kinds of long strikes like a regular punch but not to short distance finger strikes). Meanwhile, Fu Sheng struggles to get taken in by his Hung Gar teacher (Simon Yuen) and has to camp by his place to watch him practice and tries to mimick his moves. He ultimately gets accepted and practices the Tiger and Crane technique, the idea being to attack the Steel Armor champion using Tiger Style and attacking him with the Crane style by surprise to hit his only other weak point - his eyes. But the Crane attack has to be carefully thought out and to succeed, because he'll have only one chance. I won't spoil the ending, but I found it upbeat and kind of happy for a Chang Cheh film

I omitted the subplot of the romances Fu Sheng and CKC have, though they provide some lighter and more comedic moments as well as establishing the opposition between the more childish and turbulent Fu Sheng (whose girlfriend here is equally childish and turbulent, resulting in a lot of goofy moments with the two) and the more mature and more serious CKC (the romance is just glanced over by comparison) - an opposition in characters you may also find in *Disciples of Shaolin*.



Anyway, let's dive into our subject (and what is probably the best part of the movie): the Animal Styles.

- The Eagle Claw: Bruce Tong uses the Eagle Claw to fight Wang Lung Wei's Qi Dong master. His style is aggressive and fast, with very powerful strikes. His training is rather colorful since it consists in catching fish, chopping down trees and removing their bark. When fighting Wang Lung Wei, we see the main qualities of his style - he's fast, aggressive and while he barely hits his opponent (Wang Lung Wei gets hit a couple of times), he clearly puts him in trouble as we see the guy getting anxious and sweating a lot (as opposed to his calm character seen in previous scenes). Wang Lung Wei only gets the best of his opponent by tricking him into getting his fingers stuck in a massive piece of wood (in which he seems to stay stuck) before breaking them. A severe beating finishes our character off.

- The Rolling Eagle Claw: Gordon Liu (who sports hair with a tail here - it looks strange when you're used to his bald monk look, but he still looks good that way IMO) uses this style in order to kick Beardy's groin. The style features some Eagle Claw hand moves, but a key part is rolling on the floor kicking upwards. His training is more standard than that of Bruce Tong, since he practices actual shapes. In his fight against Beardy, he uses mainly hand shapes and only starts really rolling around later on. In spite of a lack of Animal Styles for the most part (his hand techniques seem rather regular and not very Eagle-based), this fight is impressive in the fact that Beardy really looks like a powerhouse in this film. Before the fight, the two characters take their tops off and Beardy is made to appear much bigger than the frail-looking Gordon Liu (he's actually only slightly taller). The fight gets bad for the heroic one when he finally starts rolling, which comes up after Beardy sucked his groin in. A couple of hits in the groin later (with massive sound effects and great facial expressions from the villain), Beardy has broken both of Gordon Liu's legs and the latter uses Eagle Claw hand moves to put an end to his agony. The line with the Pai Mei reference I quoted at the beginning comes afterwards when the master hears getting kicked in the groin didn't affect the Steel Armor champion.

- The Tiger and Crane Style: Fu Sheng first watches his not-yet master and tries mimicking the style. Later on (courtesy of his girlfriend), he gets taken in and the master helps him improve what he already knows of the style. As I mentioned in my summary of the movie, Fu Sheng is to mainly use Tiger and save Crane for an opportunity when he could attack his enemy's eyes with the most chances of succeeding (since a kick in the groin didn't do it, poking his eyes out is the only way to take Beardy down). The Tiger style is a bit like the Eagle Claw: fast, aggressive, the hands form claws (5 fingers instead of 3) and Fu Sheng pulls it off really well. In the final fight, Fu Sheng mixes basic techniques, some Tiger and a bit of rolling (and useless groin kicking, with flashbacks in black and white to Gordon Liu's fight against Beardy) to put his opponent off guard before using a Crane technique and plunging his fingers into his eyes (throw in a final blow to the groin for good measure, and off goes Beardy). The fight has an interesting bit of a difference compared to the one between Beardy and Gordon Liu earlier in terms of cinematography as in the beginning Beardy appears less secure (notably in his facial expression - but again, CKC just "Wing Chuned" Wang Lung Wei's guts out) while Fu Sheng is made to appear the strongest.

I felt like this review could seem a bit redundant since the movie has similarities to *Executioners from Shaolin* that ShaOwlInDude reviewed earlier, but *Shaolin Martial Arts* offers a very solid depiction of some Animal Styles and the action is great, so I guess it's worth the trouble and I'd recommend it in case you hadn't seen it. Also, the film is interesting in that it is a Shaolin movie that isn't set in the usual Shaolin canon from the previous entries in the cycle. While the previous films - *Heroes Two* and *Men from the Monastery* - dealt with Fong Sai-Yuk and the burning of Shaolin Temple this movie is obviously set a few generations later (not as much as *Disciples of Shaolin* which is set in much more recent times though having characters reminiscent of the Shaolin-era people played by the same actors) but still alludes to past Shaolin mythology with a Shaolin character refusing to give up and mentioning Fong Sai-Yuk as an example to follow and the master comparing Beardy's skill to Pai Mei's.

**Shaolin Plot (Hong Kong, 1977: Huang Feng)** - When a Manchu prince (Chan Sing) allows a meeting of all the kung fu masters, both Shaolin and Wu-Tang decide not to attend. The prince takes this as an insult and sets out to steal the kung fu secrets of the two sects. An attack on Wu Tang leaves a single survivor (James Tien) but the prince has to resort to more devious means to infiltrate Shaolin temple and gain access to the guarded library of kung fu manuals.

Intelligent plotting combining classical revenge and sect rival themes is well balanced with competent and frequent fight scenes. With the likes of Meng Hoi, Yuen Biao, Mars, Fong Hak On, Yuen Wah, Kwan Yung Moon and Casanova Wong the fight sequences are quite special. Samo appears as a villain in a similar vein to the one he played in 'Broken Oath'. While James Tien is the main star (and a very good job he does of it too) he is completely overshadowed by the kicking performances of Kwan Yung Moon and Casanova Wong in the final reel. Although an early performance from Ca Sa Fa, it's also one of the best I've seen and he really owns this film.

**Shaolin Prince (Hong Kong, 1983: Tong Gai) – aka Death Mask of the Ninja** - The emperor is assassinated by 9th Lord (Jason Pai Piao) so that he can take the throne, luckily his two infant princes are rescued, and raised by separate parties. One (Ti Lung) is rescued by three crazy, exiled monks, who teach him martial arts. The second prince (Derek Yee) by the Prime Minister (Ku Feng.), he too is taught martial arts, but it must be kept secret from Lord 9. The two must reconcile and work together to restore the throne.

The story is actually pretty good, and it has a light hearted feel to it, with some decent comedy mixed in as well. Acting was pretty decent all around. It's very nice to see Ti Lung play a different role than he usually does, and he does a good job with it here, as the ignorant and innocent prince. The three "Holy Fools" who raise Ti Lung are entertaining, and I found their antics to be hilarious, although as with most Shaw comedy, some may find it more annoying than funny. Pai Piao was great as the villain, and his character is very memorable, and Derek Yee is basically just Derek Yee... The rest of the cast is largely Shaw character actors, and they all do a decent job.

Tong Gai directed this, and also headed the action. It is interesting to see that he did a lot more experimental things with the action when he wasn't working under someone else.. But it is nice to see, and his few movies (I've only seen two of the three) have a distinct feel, and are easily separable from the work he did for others. Most of the fighting in this is grounded, and all of it is very well done. There is a lot of slapstick in the fighting, and the group fights are handled exceptionally. There is a good mix of weapons and unarmed combat. All of the fighting cast put in a very good performance. One person I'd like to give a shout out to is Tong Gai himself, he plays the leader of the Lohan. He has a fight with Derek Yee where he wields two swords and this fight MAY be the best grounded fight of the movie. I didn't realize Tong Gai was a hell of a screen fighter himself, he looks like a tornado as he twirls his swords and charges at Derek Yee! Haha, I bet I have missed him in other movies too, I'll have to keep an eye out for him. The finale is a fantastic 2v1, and probably one of the better fighting performances I've seen for all three cast members. It is mostly grounded, but there is some wire-work and other stuff mixed in (Ti Lung attacks the men holding the throne as Derek Yee attacks Pai Piao!), but it is all well done. Now onto the experimental stuff; Here we see Tong Gai's first attempt at the Lohan Monk stunts (to my knowledge), he and the crew do a great job and it is some pretty impressive wire-work, and extremely impressive for the time. To my knowledge, these were nothing remotely close to this being pulled off before this movie. He would improve this, doing similar, but more insane stunts in his next directorial effort "Shaolin Intruders".. At the moment, I'd have to say I prefer "Prince" to Shaolin Intruders, and it's probably because the latter is more stunt based, and "Prince" has a better plot and more grounded work.. But I'll watch that one again soon too.

As with the rest of the movie I have posted about in this thread so far, this features some beautiful, colorful sets. The dub was decent, nothing really stood out about it til the end - I felt Pai Piao's dubbed voice worked well with his character. Either the soundtrack was unmemorable, or I didn't pay enough attention to it, which I have been guilty of before. There really isn't TOO much crazy stuff about this one compared to the Bastard Swordsman movies. Yeah there is the Water and Fire Generals, but they are only in a few parts. Derek Yee's sword has a special ability, but luckily it is only used once, because the effects here look much worse than those in Bastard Swordsman. Oh yeah, there is also a supernatural part, and an exorcism. Are there any other classic kung fu movies with an exorcism?

This is a great movie, and I loved it. I really can't decide between this and The Bastard Swordsman which would be my favorite. This has better action, but The Bastard Swordsman seems to have a more engaging plot, and adventurous feel. They both have unique, memorable characters and awesome villains. So for now, I won't pick, I'll just have both! Anyone who is a fan of this era/type of Shaw flick owes it to themselves to see both as well!

**Shaolin Red Master (Taiwan, 1979: Sung Ting-Mei) - Red Shaolin Master; Red Clothes Lama; Shaolin Tough Kid** - The Shaolin Kid must use the deadliest Shaolin fighting techniques to find his Father murderer and rid the world of ruthless Tibetan Red Lama (Tommy Lee). Along the way, The Shaolin Kid must uncover many hidden truths about his troubled past.

This was a little above average movie. The story has some holes with the Hu Chin and Kao Siao Po (the waiter) going into the mortuary to do something. The action is pretty good, led by Chi Kuan Chun, of course. There is also a lot of secrets that he must discover. Chi Kuan Chun is pretty good as always. Tommy Lee is a solid villain with great ability. Which I saw in Hot, Cool and The Vicious and The Green Jade Statuette. He is also a very underrated action director. In this movie also is Hu Chin, Lung Fei, Jimmy Lee, Hsieh Han and Phillip Kao Fei.

The action is pretty good. It is nothing groundbreaking, but Chi Kuan Chun and Tommy Lee make the action good. Chi Kuan Chun was strong and tough. He was determined to find his killer. I liked his presence in this movie. I give him my standout performance award.

**Shaolin Swallow (Taiwan, 1978: Wu Min-Hsiung) – aka Chin Sha Yen** - The film opens amidst a stormy night and straight away we witness the ruthless murder of two innocent civilians. The men are both killed off by a Deadly Phoenix that is found embedded in their throats. Nearby, respected elder (and Polly Kuan's uncle) Master Chien is interrupted by a masked intruder and, after a brief exchange of words, a fight ensues and Master Chien is killed with the assailant making off with the famous Long Rainbow Sword. At the scene of the crime the Head Guard - Mr Lai, explains that the only person who uses the Deadly Phoenix is the one known as Sha-Yen Chin (Golden Bird Killer). Hsiao Yung (Polly Kuan) must now set off in the hopes of tracking down the mysterious killer and avenge her uncle's death.

Fans of Polly Kuan's Red Phoenix will find much to enjoy in this film which it shares many obvious similarities with (same leading lady, deadly bird projectiles and a masked killer). Like Red Phoenix, the killers identity is wisely kept a secret until the final reel. Up until then Sha-Yen Chin could be any one of the 6 main characters and typically they all have a reason to find the killer themselves - be it for money, revenge or to clear their name for being wrongly framed, each character in turn assists and then outwits each other in the race to reveal the killers identity.

Polly Kuan is on very fine form in this film. Always a pleasure to watch, here she is also a lot sharper and considerably more fiery than in many of her other roles. She has quite a few brief swordfights throughout the film with her encounter with Sze Ma Lung being my favourite.

There is Champ Wang - he may or may not be Sha-Yen Chin...but after being overheard announcing himself as "Mr. Chin" he is hounded at every turn leading to a number of exciting tea house fights. Sek Fung as a Chivalrous Scholar and Sze Ma Lung as Lone Visitor are also on the trail of Sha Yen Chin and disappear and re-appear at the most crucial and suspicious of moments...

There are plenty of fights which permeate this puzzling story - most of it is well executed Swordplay, with some emphasis given to hidden and inventive weaponry. There is some hand-to-hand combat too mainly in the free for all finale which is cut short by the film's slightly unsatisfactory 'resolution'.

Overall 'Sha-Yen Chin' is an engrossing and exciting swordplay with a strong whodunnit element. It's also essential viewing for Polly Kuan & Champ Wang fans and although a bizarre conclusion to the tale stopped it from getting top marks - this still comes strongly recommended to almost all Kung Fu fans.

**Shaolin Temple, The (Hong Kong, 1976: Chang Cheh)** - Another ambitious work from Chang Cheh in which he assembles just about all of Shaw's major martial arts stars of the day, and a few of the 'up and comings', for an epic portrayal of events leading to the sacking of the Shaolin temple by the Manchus.

Rather than tell a single story the film is a tangle of sub-plots through which the conditions and training undertaken by the monks is colourfully illustrated. It begins with Fong Sai Yuk (Fu Sheng) and his companions sitting outside the temple for five whole days before they are allowed inside and become the first secular students. They are soon followed by more, including Kuo Chui and Lee Yi Min, but only a few manage to pass the first test of waiting outside without shelter, food or water. Special entry is given to Ti Lung's band of rebel soldiers that includes David Chiang and Wang Lung Wei. Each of the men that gains entry is trained in a different skill, often through the jobs they are given in the temple. This middle section is full of inventiveness.

The film is split into three sections; getting into Shaolin temple, training in Shaolin temple and fighting in Shaolin temple. That's not to say that the action is solely reserved for the ending however. Throughout the main section there is a feud between Fu Sheng and Wang Lung Wei which manifests itself in a monthly bout between the two and adds an extra element to the film's climax. There are also numerous combat sequences that create a nice prelude for what is to come later. While screen time is shared by so many major stars, there's still time for development of the major characters. Fu Sheng's playful charisma is allowed to come through in Fong Sai Yuk's mischief.

The film builds up to an absolutely blistering final reel in which the Manchus storm the Shaolin temple and fight with the students. This is a solid half hour of kung fu action in which all of the characters are given a chance to

showcase their new found skills. One of the highlights for me was seeing Kuo Chui, as a light skills expert, facing Lu Feng in a duel featuring the timing so characteristic of their later films. However it would be very hard to choose a favourite moment from a film that is just filled to the brim with class.

**Shaolin Temple (Taiwan, 1976: Tong Sang) - aka Seven Spirit Pagoda** - The absolutely wonderful Hsu Feng (A Touch of Zen) stars in this sub-par film that should not be confused with the solidly enjoyable Shaolin Temple from the Mainland, Starring Jet Li. That film is a whole hell of a lot better than this movie, though Buddha (or, if you are dubbed, Budder) knows it pains me to dole out a negative review to anything involving Hsu Feng.

Two sisters are given the job of protecting the prince (not to be confused with the Artist Formerly Known as Prince). A treacherous official has betrayed the royal family and set himself up as emperor. The prince has been poisoned and will die unless one of the sisters (Hsu Feng) can get the magic cure, which is closely guarded deep inside Shaolin Temple.

The film flips back and forth between one sister who is protecting the Prince against hordes of evil soldiers, and the other sister, who must pass seven challenges at Shaolin Temple before they will give her the cure. The prince himself is sort of funny, and he actually acts a little like Prince, or the artist formerly known as Prince. He prances around and acts like a loon while wearing his white robes, and that at least had me laughing. The rest of the movie is not that interesting.

A lot of people give this film glowing praise, but I just didn't see eye to eye with them. I mean, the tests of Shaolin are okay, but if I want a house of traps type film, I'll watch House of Traps, which starred the Venoms and was really exciting and lots of fun.

There is plenty of heroic stuff in the name of the country, and lots of swordfighting, as well as some flying. The Prince, who goes mad because of the poison, turns in some comical moments, but Hsu Feng really outshines the rest of the cast. The acting is all fine, the outdoor sets and location work are nice, but the film never clicks for me. Maybe if I watch it again, I will enjoy it more. After all, I saw it in like 1990, when I was but a fledgling critic, so know that I am tempered by more experience and wisdom, perhaps I will enjoy it more. But since all I have to go on are my current memories, all I can say is this movie is not too hot.

**Shaolin Temple (People's Republic of China, 1982: Cheung Hsin Yen)** - New to DVD in the UK is 'the Shaolin Temple' from Eastern Heroes video. Jet Lee's debut appearance in this, the first in a series of three, is nothing short of fantastic.

Jet Lee plays Chen Yuan who escapes to Shaolin Temple after his father is killed by the evil warlord Wang Jen Tse. Badly injured during his escape he is nursed back to health by the monks. When Chen secretly watches the monks practice their martial arts he is inspired to join the monastery. Although there are some amongst the monks who are suspicious of Chen's motives, revenge is not acceptable reason for learning Kung Fu, he is allowed to join and his training begins. However Chen quickly becomes frustrated with the regime and leaves to exact his revenge against Wang.

Unfortunately he is no match for Wang's awesome drunken sword technique and is lucky to escape with his life. Returning to the temple he continues with his training to become fully prepared for the final showdown.

Excellent choreography and outstanding martial arts skills of the cast elevate this film into the realms of classic. The training sequences especially provide the perfect opportunity for Jet Lee to showcase the talents that made him five times Wu Shu champion. It is not only Jet Lee who shines as the cast is filled with martial arts champions displaying their skills in all manner of styles and weaponry. The fight scenes are full of moments that had me reaching for the rewind button on the remote control and show that wires are not always necessary to make a fighter look fantastic. In addition to all this, the film is shot against a backdrop of beautiful locations including the real Shaolin Temple.

**Shaolin Temple 2: Kids From Shaolin (People's Republic of China, 1984: Cheung Hsin Yen)** - After the success of Shaolin Temple, which turned Jet Li into an overnight star, the cast were re-united in this sequel. Despite having the same cast the story and characters are completely different to the original movie, as is the mood of the film which is much lighter. While nowhere near as action packed as the first film it still contains some rather excellent wu-shu displays and some superbly choreographed fight sequences.

Jet plays the eldest of 10 adopted sons of a Shaolin master, together they are known as the Dragon family. On the opposite side of the river lives the Phoenix family, a Wu-tang Master who's wife has given birth to eight girls. The two families are deeply mistrustful of each other and this mistrust is exploited by a gang of bandits who want to wipe the two factions out.

For the biggest part of the film the story concentrates on the relationship between the two families with the biggest focus being on comedy. For the first half hour I thought it was going to be a musical with even Jet breaking into song. It isn't until the last twenty minutes that things really start to get interesting. When the bandits finally attack in full force the two families unite in a terrific battle. This includes a breathtaking scene where Jet takes on two opponents at the same time, all three combatants using three sectional staffs. The movie also has some exceptional sword play moments.

Like the first movie the cast is made up of competent martial artists who display a wide variety of styles and techniques. All the fight scenes are performed without the use of wires and there is no obvious undercranking.

**Shaolin Temple Against Lama (Taiwan, 1983: Chang Chien-Chi)** - The movie I'm reviewing is not *Shaolin vs. Lama*, which was directed by the great Taiwanese director Lee Tso Nam and is considered one of the all-time great kung fu movies. However, before we begin, let me point out that in both films, the evil Tibetan Lama villains are masters of styles that make their bodies impervious to any sort of harm (except for a few weak points). You know, if Tibetans today would stick to their martial roots and practice these styles, maybe they wouldn't have so many problems with the Chinese commies. That said, let's talk about the plot (such as it is).

In Ancient Tibet, the Lamas are divided into five factions and are ruled over by one emperor. The Tibetan prince (Alexander Lo Rei, the Taiwanese Michael Dudikoff who appeared in films like *Shaolin Dolemite* and the *Ninja Death* trilogy) is studying martial arts with the Red Lama faction and will soon assume his throne. At the same time, the leader of the Black Lama Faction, Cha Siu (Alan Chui, *Kung Fu vs. Yoga* and *Last Hero in China*, who's also the action director here) is trying to get the martial arts manuals from all of the kung fu schools in the country so that he may be all powerful and take over Tibet.

Unfortunately, there are two schools who haven't given in to him so far: the Ching school and the Shaolin Temple. So he sends his men to the Ching School and they kill everybody and get the manual. They are less successful, however, at the Shaolin Temple. One of the high officials tries to talk Cha Siu out of his quest for power, which Cha Siu responds to by sending his men to kill him. Luckily, he's protected by the Shaolin Monks and a drunken master (who's really a Shaolin monk in disguise).

At the same time, Cha Siu is sending his assassins to kill the Prince, who has just left the Red Faction monastery. One funny part is that the Red Lama leader tells the Prince to resolve the conflict between the Black Faction and the Shaolin Temple, telling him, "Not all Black Faction members are evil and not all Shaolin monks are good." Well, at the end of the film, all of the Shaolin monks were good and all of the Black Faction members are both evil and dead. Some wise leader you are.

Not being able to kill the Prince, Cha Siu decides to deceive the Prince into thinking that the Shaolin monks are evil, by staging assassination attempts by bald guys with white dots on their heads. The Prince goes to the Shaolin Temple to challenge the monks and gets his booty handed back to him, and is forced to stay at the temple and train. While all this is going on, Cha Siu hires the Persian Killers to kill off the Red Lamas and the Shaolin monks. Several high-octane throwdowns ensue.

Well, that's the plot. Before I talk about the action, let me mention that this film is a prime example of the cheap chopsockey film that was made in Taiwan. Cha Siu's lair is pretty threadbare with a silly multi-armed statue adorning his throne/altar. The costumes are these silly, bright, multi-colored kung fu outfits I can't imagine anyone in their right mind using, not even during the Ming Dynasty (or whenever the film is set). There are some nice exterior shots of Tibetan temples and people and stuff, although if you compare the Taiwanese actors to the people you see in the establishing shots, they look nothing alike.

Let's discuss the action. This is one of the most action-packed films I have ever seen. There are no less than 19 set pieces which take up more than half of the film's running time. Alan Chui's choreography is a lot better here than in a lot of other low-budget Taiwanese films. There is some occasional excessive undercranking which cheapens things a bit, although it gets less prevalent as the film progresses. The main problem is that the Alan Chui could have (and should have) made the action a lot more varied. It's kind of the same thing over and over again (and after 19 set pieces, it is a bit hard to remember one fight from the other). There is some weapons work (spears, poles, sabers, and assault blades), but none of it is particularly memorable.

Nonetheless, most of the actors are in top form. Alexander Lo Rei looks particularly good in this movie, especially in the last two fights (the best in the movie) when he starts pulling off some bootwork that'd make Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee proud. Alan Chui doesn't see much action until the end, but he's a talented onscreen fighter and makes the perfect villain for Lo Rei to fight. Everyone else is pretty solid, even if their fights aren't particularly memorable.

I do recommend this film for fans of the genre, although naysayers will probably be bored after the fifth or sixth fight scene.

**Shaolin Temple Strikes Back (Taiwan, 1981: Joseph Kuo)** - Pretty good movie. The story is simple and nothing special (it's a Joseph Kuo flick). The movie opens up with a bang, and within the first 5 minutes you know Chen Shan is going to be a bad man. I really liked the tense "on the run" feeling the first 15 minutes had, and wish it stuck with that... But it's a Shaolin movie.... Unfortunately I felt the middle of the movie seemed to drag a bit, outside of a couple scenes featuring either Mark Long or Chen Shan. There were mainly some dull training, and ok comedy scenes during this part of the film. I wish they would have used this time to explore the relationship between Mark Long and Chen Shan, or build some characterization..

Anyway, the last 45 minutes or so of the movie is great. Filled with awesome fighting, especially the final sequence that is a war with multiple fights on screen at a time. Lung Siu Fei was a decent leading man and fighter, but he is overshadowed by Mark Long (who plays a similar character to his in Five Fighters from Shaolin), and moreso by Chen Shan, who is in top form in this. Chen Shan looks so damn good here, powerful, shows kicks that compete with the best kickers, and mixes in some of his signature throwing! He even does Hwang's flying triple kick, and it doesn't disappoint. My only complaint about the fights is that some from earlier in the film are so dark you can't see what's going on, and also they're under cranked, but they're still highly enjoyable despite the under cranking.

This movie seemed to have a pretty big budget for what it was. There were extras, and better costumes than you usual see in a Kuo flick. I also really liked the soundtrack, even if it is only like 3 songs, it doesn't matter if they're awesome.

Even though this isn't a great movie, and it isn't one of Kuos best movies, I'd still consider it a must see. It's interesting to see a Kuo film that really feels epic at times. Chen Shan's performance is top class, and Mark Long's monk character is always awesome. The fighting is very good, and pretty brutal at times. Chen Shan really does bring explosiveness and power that few others of the time could compete with.

**Shaolin: The Blood Mission (South Korea, 1984: Park Woo-Sang)** - aka **The Four Shaolin Temple** - The General of the local government is sent out to find the second half of a sacred book that lists the names of revolutionaries in the territory. His search leads him eventually to a Shaolin Temple where the Monks eventually fight the government to protect two revolutionaries seeking the temple as a hideout.

I of course had some positive expectations in watching this movie, only because it stars no other than the kicking death machine himself, Hwang Jang Lee. As usual he plays a villain in this movie, and a very evil one at that. There is one scene in particular where we see Hwang Jang Lee's character along with one of his henchmen, playing what looks like a game of chess, with real live young women as the chess pieces. Don't sound too bad? .. well when one of their "chess pieces" gets within the right position, they are forced to kill the other's "chess piece". (as seen in vidclip\_04)

The story is mainly about a "book" that has been separated in half, and needs to be intact to be taken full advantage of. Also you can say the subplot is another "Shaolin vs. Manchu" movie, which I personally always enjoy watching. The story is plain and clear, with some interesting plot twist in which truly caught me off guard. I really enjoyed this movie, good story, great action.

The action by all the monks of Shaolin was very impressive, along with the always fierce kicking of Hwang Jang Lee. There was plenty of action through out this film, which definitely complimented the above average telling of the story.

Hwang Jang Lee as the evil villain definitely had the standout performance in this movie. Showing no mercy on his prey, his character is amongst one of the classics of kung fu movie "baddies".

Hwang Jang Lee fans, "Shaolin vs." plot fans, well just about any kung fu movie fan would enjoy this movie...  
soooooo .. Buy it!

**Shaolin vs. Lama (Taiwan, 1983: Lee Tso-Nam)** - A kung fu fanatic, Yu Ting (Alexander Lo Rei), searching for the ultimate master, saves a young Shaolin monk, Hsu Shi (William Yen), from a group of mobsters and sees it as a golden opportunity to enrich his kung fu skills. He persuades the young novice monk to smuggle him into Shaolin, but Ting's presence isn't welcome and he is driven out, but remains close to the temple, keeping in touch with Hsu Shi. When Ting rescues a girl from the clutches of the Flying Eagle gang, the Golden Wheel Lama and sworn enemy of Shaolin finds the perfect excuse to lead an assault on the Temple. Realizing Ting's devotion, the abbot decides to bring Ting into the Shaolin order and teach him the deadliest techniques to prepare him for the Lama's merciless fury...

This movie happens to be one of my ALL-TIME favorites, definitely in my Top 10. A classic independent movie that has all the right elements to make it such a memorable film.

This movie really has everything going for it. It features some very entertaining fight scenes, classic old school dubbing with those incredible one liners, comedy that is actually humorous, and most importantly, great pacing. You never have to go long before we are treated to some more of the dynamic kung fu action that is featured in this film. From the opening credits to the end of the film, this movie is packed with some solid fight scenes. A good time is to be had by any and all kung fu movie fans who take the time to witness an almost perfect mix of the elements. One thing that most certainly helps make this movie so unforgettable is the extremely easy to follow story line. Alexander Lo Rei is on a quest to find a master, he has been undefeated for the past 5 years and is looking to find someone better than him at kung fu in order for that person to train him to be an even better fighter than he already is. The person who eventually winds up training Lo Rei happens to be a monk from Shaolin. At first the monk was very hesitant to take on an outside student because of what happened the last time he trained someone coming from outside the temple. The person he previously trained happened to be a Tibetan Lama who infiltrated Shaolin, posed as a student, then eventually stole Shaolin's manual of their highest forms of training and advanced kung fu styles. This person, years later went on to become the head of the Tibetan Skyhawk Clan, and was set out to destroy all of Shaolin. If you have never seen this movie before, and no matter how cliché the story sounds, do yourself a favor and buy this movie ASAP, you will not regret it.

The comedy in this movie was for a change, actually funny. There were two main characters who provided the comedy relief in this film. One of them played a monk of Shaolin who soon became Lo Rei's best friend in the movie, the other played the monk's master, also from Shaolin, who was always craving food and wine. I can say the moments in this movie that were intended to make people laugh, actually made me laugh. To me this was not one of those movies like 'ODD COUPLE' for example where one might say, "if only there was no comedy at all in the movie, it would be a damn near perfect film" ... the comedy in 'Shaolin vs Lama' did not hurt the overall enjoyment of the movie at all, in fact, it added to it.

The action in this movie is Fast and Furious. Over 30 minutes + of total action and some training scenes as well. The kung fu in this movie is a perfect example of what "movie kung fu" is supposed to be like, which should always be ENTERTAINING to watch! 90% of the action in this movie is hand to hand, with some slight swordplay and knife work.

Not really much blood being splashed about, but with a movie this entertaining, you don't really need a bloodbath in order to get your money's worth.

I have to say the whole cast, the director as well as the fight choreographer, Peng Kong, all deserve the Standout Performance award. Everybody played their roles perfectly, they really couldn't of done a better job. A definite MUST BUY movie if I ever saw one.

**Shaolin vs. Ninja (Taiwan, 1983: Robert Tai)** - Low-budget Taiwanese film (is there any other type?) that has terrible (by my low standards) dubbing and practically zero plot. Heck, it doesn't even have an actual main character. Basically, Shaolin has a temple on a plot of Japanese-owned land (in China) and the ninja want to take it away from them. They try to frame them and what not. Eventually, the Shaolin monks team up with a group of Japanese monks to take on the ninjas. There are some good fights here, and Robert "Shaolin Dolemite" Tai's choreography is better here than in some of his other movies (he's kind of uneven as an action director IMHO), the standout scene being the tournament that takes place shortly before the climax.

**Shaolin Vs Tai Chi (Taiwan, 1983: Wu Chia-Chun) – aka Shaolin and Tai Chi** - started off with this one as I've seen (vs Ninja) before. It was honestly a bit of a disappointment most of the way through, not really that much fighting at all which is kinda weird since these mainland cheapies are usually action packed. In fact I was wondering why Rarescope bothered at all, until the final fight. The choreography throughout was ok up to this point, pretty decent but nothing special, but then for your patience you are treated to an excellent ending where our two heroes take on the main villain. The real standout of this lengthy sequence is an incredible display of mantis fist vs drunken pole - it's relatively short but what a beauty. Hard hitting, acrobatic, creative in choreography, really well shot, pretty much exactly why I love this stuff to begin with. Others might disagree, but those few short minutes made the whole preceding 80 minutes worth while.

Originally planned as a Chang Cheh production, part of his Chang's Film. Co productions for Shaws, this ended up becoming orphaned when the company collapsed. It's the third version of the story of Shaolin hero Hu Huei-Chien to be produced by Chang and to star Chi Kuan-Chun, but at least here he is the star, rather than being ignored in favour of Fu Sheng. And since he's directed by Wu Ma rather than Chang Cheh, Chi is rather better at acting here, as Chang would often direct him by saying "Expression 5!" (that's Chi's excuse anyway!)

The film gets off to a dynamic start, with Hu avenging his father's murder, and beating the life out of Shan Mao (an actor who sadly was dead from a real life fight by the time of the film's release). The choreography is very effective, retaining the styles but also being fast and ferocious. Call me a heretic, but I find this more powerful than Lau Kar-Leung's Shaolin choreography...

On the other hand, the film now has a bit of a problem. It's opened with a very dramatic fight, and will build towards a grand finale, but it's got to fill up the middle. So we have a few too many scenes of Hu making short work of various Manchu ner-do-wells. Had the film begun with the events leading up to Hu's father being killed, the film could have given us some Shaolin training scenes (noticeably missing from this version of the story) and built towards a mid-way climax. But then we'd likely have lost the impact of the kick-ass opening so it's not as straight forward as that.

Another distinctive improvement of this film over the previous versions is that we get to see Hu's wife and child. They're not especially involving, but it makes a nice change from the tired topless male-bonding that made the dialogue scenes of Chang Cheh's Shaolin films rather dull.

As with Chang Cheh's later Two Champions of Shaolin, the film introduces its villain, Kao, part way through. In both films, Kao (played by Lu Feng in the Chang film, and here by Tan Tao-Liang) infiltrates the Shaolin patriots with overt gestures of friendship. Tan, like Chi, can be rather wooden at times but here is quite effective, selling his menace subtly by ordering a memorial plaque for his "friend", whom he will kill.

Tan is, of course, an amazing kicker, so the final clashes between him and Chi are brilliant, two distinctive styles of martial arts fighting to the death, and with a brilliantly morbid atmosphere, as we know Hu is dying from his injuries and therefore there is real tension as we hope he gets to really destroy his opponent. And to make things even grimmer, the music uses a stock cue from Dawn of the Dead, so we can think of our hero dying horribly, and the zombie apocalypse nightmare!

**Shaolin Wooden Men (Hong Kong, 1976: Lo Wei) - 36 Wooden Men; Shaolin Chamber of Death** - Before reaching stardom ("Snake in the Eagle's Shadow"), and before he hit his artistic stride, Jackie Chan appeared in a number of mediocre, relatively sober (non-comedy) "pure" kung fu productions. This early effort directed by Lo Wei was perhaps Jackie's most conventional role: a "mute" boy who is trained by two monks at Shaolin Temple (one a renegade, the other a reclusive old master) and a Buddhist nun, with the goal of avenging his father's death. Along the way, he must fight through the Shaolin Wooden Men hall (an alley of mechanical wooden dummies). Jackie's non-verbal acting is greatly restrained, close to horrible. Almost as if Lo Wei had shouted through a bull horn: "Cut! Jackie, please no expressions! Remember, this movie is about WOODEN MEN!" The story contains some dead spots, but is enjoyable enough. The action is plentiful. Lots of training scenes. You can tell from the long opening credits what kind of film it is: Jackie takes on monks using various animal styles (panther, tiger, crane, snake). Unfortunately, throughout the film, Jackie's movements are fluid, on the flowery side, and a bit slow. Styles: Jackie emphasizes snake and what appears to be variations of hung gar, combined with acrobatics (somersaults, flips). Jackie finally wakes up in the final duel vs. Kam Kong. This fight is more reminiscent of later Jackie fare ("Snake in Eagle's Shadow", "Drunken Master").



**She'd Hate Rather Love (Taiwan, 1971: Hua Hui-Ying)** - One of many signs that there were only precious few directors leading the way in Taiwan when it came to fantasy tinged swordplay. Hua Hui-Ying's film at hand here boasts decent production values and even quite an extended comedic side as David Tang plays mind games on the bandits he's asked to help fight. But Hua has difficulty breaking through as the story, conflict and beneath surface-motivations become clear. Resulting in a dull frame and the primitive, clunky action choreography fails to generate excitement.

**Showdown at Cotton Mill (Taiwan, 1978: Wu Ma)** - A staggeringly prolific actor with a career stretching from the seventies to the end of the nineties (check out his entry at HKMDB), most people will know Wu Ma from his appearances in many classics; often in a supporting comedic role. Many, like me, might not be so familiar with his directorial work but I'm certainly keen to see more after watching 'Showdown at the Cotton Mill'. Wu Ma delivers a very well paced story that never seems to drag and delivers action at just the right moments. Deservedly, the film has gained a very strong reputation, not only because of its rareness but also because of the fine performances from the two main protagonists; Chi Kwan Chun and Tan Tao Liang.

Subtitles on the version I was watching were a little difficult to follow but I got the main gist of what was happening. The film begins with Chi Kuan Chun as a shaolin rebel who gets himself into trouble by fighting, and even killing in one instance, a number of government officials. Chi goes into hiding when soldiers are sent to arrest him so an undercover agent (Tan Tao Liang) tries to flush him out instead. Chi barely escapes with his life after an initial encounter with Tan but after taking time out to recover he goes on the offensive for the superb final battle.

Chi Kuan Chun puts on a fine display of Five Animals style kung fu in numerous scenes that are very well choreographed with intricate moves. For the main part of the film the fights are all hand based with little or no weapons use although the complexity of the fights means that they are far from dull. Kicking comes in spades in the last twenty minutes or so when Tan Tao Liang is finally let loose. He puts together some superb techniques such as effortlessly alternating kicks at different heights without putting his foot down; its the usual thing he does but I never get bored of watching it. Wu Ma does a fine job of editing and we are able to see all techniques clearly. Its a great ending to a great film.

While the plot is not that involved and quite generic it manages to carry enough interest. This film, like any other kung fu flick, is all about the fighting and it doesn't disappoint. Sadly the original print has apparently been completely lost so its highly unlikely that we'll ever see a restored DVD version (somebody please prove me wrong).

**Showdown at the Equator (Hong Kong, 1978: Gwan Jing-Leung)** - While certainly entertaining (at least in spurts), *Showdown at the Equator* features two important bait and switches. First, the film suffers from some terrible B-movie titling. You see, the title suggests a Central African, Indonesian or Northern Brazilian setting. Any one of those places would certainly make for a unique kung fu movie experience, although Indonesia would most likely be the place that the filmmakers would have money to film. Sadly, the movie is set in Hong Kong, rendering the English title completely null. I can't blame the writer, as the Chinese title translates into something akin to "Martial Law Armed Venture". The second lie is in the casting, which places Lo Lieh in top billing and Bruce Leung Siu-Lung in third place. That's not very accurate, as Lo Lieh's role amounts to little more than a glorified cameo and Leung Siu-Lung in a supporting role.

The movie opens up with a non-sequitur action sequence in which a couple of guys drive up to a building and make a beeline to a room where some schmo is hurriedly packing his suitcase. A fight—complete with the most primitive early 70s basher choreography—breaks out and goes on for almost five minutes until the suitcase guy is knocked off the roof to his doom. I **\*think\*** this scene is referenced later on when Leung Siu-Lung, who plays an undercover cop, is asked by his superior to investigate the murder, but it's quickly forgotten about. The next scene takes us to a restaurant where much of the action will take place, owned by some guy and his daughter, played by Nora Miao. The local gang shows up and demands "insurance" money, tearing up the place when the owner won't pay up. They're visited later by a loner (frequent Leung Siu-Lung collaborator Larry Lee) who offers to help them out. He first beats up the employees of the gang leader's bar, and then the gang leader and his men when they come back to the restaurant to settle accounts.

Well, that gang leader is actually a low-level enforcer in a larger racket that the police want to take down. His boss is a bald fellow (Tong Tin-Hei) who runs a casino. In turn, he answers to Fung Ngai (who played the overweight sensei in *Fist of Fury*), who in turn, answers to the mysterious figure known only as "Steve" (Lo Lieh, whose name is spelled "Law Lieed" in the opening credits). As it turns out, Larry Lee is an undercover cop trying to bust the gang, but his boss (whose assistant, interestingly enough, is not Chinese, but Indian) wants to find out who the big kahuna is before making his move. In any case, there a bunch of fights and Larry has his cover blown and Nora Miao is kidnapped in the most unconvincing scene of the movie: Nora has already established herself as a top fighter in this movie, but the villains grab her arms and drag her to a waiting car in broad daylight. Couldn't she just karate chop the piss out of these guys?

And then there's Bruce Leung. Early in the movie, we meet his character, who apparently is an undercover cop posing as a mechanic who's being courted by Fung Ngai's men. An early scene with his mother suggests that he'll be one of the main characters. His cover is blown in the first act, mainly because his idiot boss (also Larry Lee's boss) has the unfortunately habit of meeting his undercovers for status updates in public places. Nice work, stupid. But after that, Leung's character just sort of appears occasionally and doesn't do much...until the climax, when he takes over and the final fight revolves solely around him and Lo Lieh. That's some weird (re: bad) writing right there, folks.

Obviously, films like this live or die on their action and this one gets a solid B. The action duties are given to Ng Ming-Choi, a heavyset fellow whom perceptive fans will recognize as being one of the Japanese students in *Fist of Fury* and one of the guards that Bolo Yeung kills in *Enter the Dragon*. He also doubles as a thug in this movie. The fights are of the basher style popular in the early 70s, but which had more or less fallen out of favor by 1978. The first fight is something out of a Jimmy Wang Yu film, but thankfully things improve once the more talented people get involved. Most of the fights belong to Larry Lee, whose the main star of the movie, despite being fourth billed. He looks pretty good in his fights: he's fast, intense and his kicks reach a decent height. His punches are mainly Mississippi Haymakers, but there's more power behind them than your average early 70s chopsockey.

Despite the bulk of the fighting going to Larry Lee, it's Bruce Leung whose fights really stand out. He only has three (two of which are in the last 10 minutes), but his kicks are quite good. I liked his alternating-feet roundhouse kicks, which he pulled off in rather quick succession. Even cooler is watching him perform some pre-*Ip Man* machine gun punches during his initial fight. He doesn't quite match Donnie Yen for quantity, but it's still pretty neat to see something like that in a 70s movie. Also impressive is Nora Miao, who steps on the scene fighting off thugs with nunchaku! She doesn't perform any flashy moves, but she chops and ridge hands her opponents like she means it (her natural (and cute) scowl helps sells the intensity of her blows).

I'm disappointed that there wasn't more from Bruce Leung Siu-Lung and the finale is a bit disappointing, especially when they interrupt the Leung/Lo Lieh fight for a car chase involving a VW bug, but the movie wasn't a total waste. The fights range from pretty good to quite impressive and the cast is solid as well. Not particularly memorable, but I think hardcore old school fans should find something to enjoy here.

**Silver Maid (Taiwan, 1969: Fu Nan-Du)** - Although personally at a disadvantage somewhat due to the cropped print also cutting off most of the subtitles, you can extract the basics out of *Silver Maid* and certainly how it does as a Taiwanese fantasy spectacle. Because here we're talking a visual ride amidst a rival sect plot (the Red and Black Devils respectively) and one of the biggest draws in *Silver Maid* is its ideas in infancy. Not shy about throwing big concepts up on screen without extensive special effects knowhow or experience, the enhanced fighting (unless we're talking little *Silver Maid* herself and her ability to walk on water and fire) takes a backseat to among other things a fight with a snake (puppet) and while slow and clunky, there's admirable energy here. A cinema that's feeling its way through an existing genre. Only this time they want it bigger and more energetic. In 1969 it's not quite there but combined with a possible viewer-fascination for the development and the colors the genre can offer up, *Silver Maid* is worth a look.

**Silver Knife, Scarlet Blade (Hong Kong, 1969: Huang Feng)** - Petrina Fung and Sek Kin do make an impression, mostly thanks to lifelong, legendary status. But despite a swordplay genre having seen groundbreaking efforts over at Shaw Brothers at the same time, this Kin Shing Film Company production possesses little but good costumes and in reality is too primitive to further the genre. Largely talky and providing no real genre noise until Fung and Sek Kin square off at the end, it's only here Lau Kar-Leung's action becomes a bit more active with creative violence and wire-work. Even at 82 minutes, it's still a long sit.

**Six Assassins (Hong Kong, 1971: Jeng Cheong-Woh)** - Written and directed by Jeng Cheong-Woh (King Boxer), *Six Assassins* scores points for brevity and standard (meaning high standard) Shaw Brothers production values but isn't one that lingers. Concerning the team of assassins Mu Jun-Jie (Ling Yun) puts together to take out the brother (Yun Il-Bong) of the emperor, at 79 minutes there's still lots of talk, plot and characters packed into the movie and it can get pretty uninteresting at most points. Latching on to the basic story and a well executed Shaw Brothers frame (as per almost usual) helps as well as at points intense swordplay and Ling Yun bringing an intense presence in the lead. Worth anyone's short time even though you won't remember you spent time with *Six Assassins* shortly thereafter. Also with Lily Li.

**Six Directions Boxing, The (Taiwan, 1980: Tyrone Hsu Hsia)** - Basic yet overly busy martial arts from Taiwan, *The Six Directions Boxing* presents a splendid cast (a great looking David Chiang, Paul Chun, Simon Yuen, Yueh Hua etc) but yet it comes off as a product of its time. Meaning it's yet another kung fu picture that was part of the production flow. Leaving your consciousness quickly therefore, within we do get a fairly logical balance between dark and light and part of the Yuen family (Simon Yuen's sons Yuen Yat-Choh, Yuen Cheung-Yan and Brandy Yuen) choreographs some very noteworthy fight scenes. Tyrone Hsu (*The Red Phoenix*) intends to tell a story clearly rather than shoot a quickie set mainly outside but with such a huge character gallery, even basic matters get muddled. At least there's a monkey to look at.

**Six Intellectuals (Taiwan, 1969: Li Kuang-Chang) – The Combat Six** - A rebel to the Ching's is killed while he was carrying a secret list of members of the group of rebels, but the list is not found. A group of 6 members of the rebellion decides to go to the town where he was killed in order to find the list and give it to the other groups of rebels. Among them, there are Chiang Ming, Lee Shu and her brother. After a lot of twists and fights, Chiang Ming understands that there is a traitor among their group and they accept a deal with the Ching's chief who they have already fought. Finally, it appears that it's Lee Shu's brother who was the traitor and they succeed in finding the list. Very interesting movie, worth watching.

**Skyhawk, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Jeong Chang-Hwa)** - The venerable Kwan Tak-hing had played the famous Wong Fei-hung in around 80 movies. His previous one before this film was in 1970, but he was still synonymous with the role equivalent to the Tramp with Charlie Chaplin. He is probably not as known with that character now as either Jackie Chan or Jet Li (partially this has to do with the fact that many of his films need to be released; of course many now might even not know who this character even is)\* not counting Hong Kong fans from the 1950's through the 1970s.

One may wonder why Wong Fei-hung takes so long to get involved. While it works quite well early in the film and the scene with the scalding hot water is quite memorable, it becomes more than a little aggravating when his reticence goes from self-imposed Confucian restraint to waiting around for more and more evidence when you already have enough. In fact several die needlessly because of this. There are plenty of mistakes like this throughout. Later on several of the main characters perish because for some reason they think that walking alone in alley ways after they threaten to kill a relative of Ku is a good idea. It is also hilarious when Wong makes a small complaint about not killing and Leo does it anyways with no retributions from his *sifu*.

Most of the film is on location and looks quite good because of it. The very end fight scene is a mixture of on location, but mostly studio shoot which is jarring and quite noticeable because of the juxtaposition. It is easy to notice a few continuity mistakes, like Carter Wong's massive amount of sweat-stained clothes to dry and clean within the same scene (of course the background gives it away quite easily.) This was probably done (as Cal states in his review in the link below) because of Kwan's aversion to the heat there given he was around 68 at the time of filming. It is also hard not to notice *The Big Boss* vibes, or influence, well let's call it a homage. You have the drug front in Thailand, an out-of-towner character who refuses to fight (for a bit), Nora Miao and some working-class themes that get ignored rather quickly.

The fighting is quite good though. Sammo does well with the choreography and in working the strengths and hiding the weaknesses of the combatants. There are the powerful kicks from Whang In-shik, the poetic style of Kwan Tak-hing (doubled in acrobatic scenes, but he still can move), the presence of Carter Wong (I always get the feeling that while his kicks are not always fluid he could probably hurt anyone he fought against.) You get leg traps, throws and

even get a Boston crab. It is all quite impressive for the time. Sammo would continue to improve his choreography and eventually become a star in Hong Kong. It is fun to see his work.

Overall a fun film with nice location shots and good fighting.

**Sleeping Fist, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Teddy Yip)** - There is no doubt that this movie was made because of the popularity of *Drunken Master*. It takes the same Beggar So (Sam Seed) inspired *sifu* named Old Fox in Simon Yuen Siu-tin (father of Yuen Wo-ping), who would work this character until his death, with a similar wig, outfit, and drinking gourd (after careful checking on several of his films I can safely say it is not always the same one.) He possesses an esoteric fighting style, though by this time drunken style is ubiquitous so it had to be something else say something like sleeping, with an extra powerful effeminate element.\* Other similarities include the precocious yet misbehaving student (Wong Yat-lung) and some painful looking training scenes. I am sure you can guess the ending as well.

This has one of those introductions where it sets up the film in its own little microcosm by foreshadowing the story in a non-descript background and freezes the action when the credits go up. I find these openings aesthetically pleasing.

I suppose this film was also a vehicle for Wong Yat-lung, though he would be done with films pretty soon. He portrays a street urchin known as The Kid in the English dub (no similarities to Charlie Chaplin) who steals to eat and generally creates mayhem. Wong is a talented little tyke. Obviously he has spent years training, most likely opera, because he is insanely flexible, can ride a very tall unicycle and can perform fast flips and a variety of acrobatic moves, though his punches do not look like they could hurt a parrot. He befriends an undercover cop Turtle (Leung Kar-yan aka Beardy: *The Victim*) who has a debilitating and bleeding injury caused by a master Chow (Eddie Ko Hung: *We're Going to Eat You*) whom he has evidence against though this angle is irrelevant to most of the film. Being a bad guy he has a great introduction to the story when he trampolines, which is hidden of course, into the film. An injured Turtle is no match for the master, but is luckily saved by Old Fox and his stunt double. Through in a female and possible love interest who always needs saving and you have a pretty good idea on where this film is heading.

This is a film I enjoy even with its myriad of faults. The plot is too simplistic with forgotten items like the warrant, an underdeveloped love story to an overabundance of the antagonists finding the protagonists in taverns. How many times can that actually happen? The urine jokes are overflowing. The humor is overly broad with hairy moles, a banana peel joke and the annoying trombone wah-wah sound. It has a hilariously bad backdrop on one of the sets, though the hand-held photography is fine on the outdoor scenes. But the action is overall quite good and the finale is fantastic. How cool is it to fall asleep on a corpse. While Leung Kar-yan is not a trained martial artist you would have trouble knowing that. He picks up moves quickly, which is why he was always a favorite of Sammo Hung, is not overly trained in one style so he is pliable for films where he has to do different shapes (styles) and he is in shape. Here he gets to use quite a bit of mantis fist as well as the esoteric and fictional sleeping style. Plus he has that beard which gives him extra strength Chuck Norris power (I think I have been reading too many Chuck Norris facts lately.)

This film was popular enough to warrant a very similar film the following year with much of the returning cast and director except Simon Yuen in *The Thundering Mantis*. It however is not a sequel as it is wrongly sometimes written. I prefer *Sleeping Fist* overall except for the appetizingly insane ending of the later movie.

**Slice of Death (Hong Kong, 1979: Ho Meng-Hua) – aka Shaolin Abbot** – It's been a few years since I had seen it and didn't remember it with much detail. I was actually expecting it to be pretty average this time around. While the story and characters are more than unoriginal, it is entertaining with some beautiful sets and locations and some very good action. My only real mark against it besides being unoriginal are some moments of laughably bad over-acting, primarily from Ng Hong-Sang.. Yes, even for a kung fu movie.

Following the burning of the shaolin temple, David Chiang plays a monk tasked with recruiting and rebuilding the temple. Lo Lieh is back as Pai Mei leading a group of Ching loyalists to hunt down any rebels or survivors from Shaolin. Yeah, been there, done that. Luckily there is plenty of action, a good cast, and the movie is generally visually pleasing.

David Chiang puts on a good fighting performance (one of his better fighting performances at Shaw really). This may also be the only movie I've seen where he A. is bald (monk), and B. wields a staff. The fights actually start off really average but about halfway through they get really good. What really stood out to me in this film was some really good fighting from some minor Shaw character/extra actors. The fight between two of them in Jamie Luk Kim-Ming's butcher and Ng Hong-Sang's blacksmith was one of the best fights of the film, and also where the fighting started going from average to good. The finale was off to a great start with David Chiang duking it out with Lo Lieh as Pai Mei, but ends very abruptly, basically making it a disappointment.

It isn't the best film to deal with this story, but it is also far from the worst. If you are a fan of David Chiang or Shaw's in general, you could do far worse.

**Smugglers (Hong Kong, 1973: Suen Ga-Man) - aka Kung-Fu Gangbusters** - all the bone crunching bashing in the world can't help this boring trek amongst cops, drug smugglers and raging brothers out for revenge. Tony Liu (director of *Holy Flame Of The Martial World*) is in the latter part and certainly possesses a physique fit for anger but Ed Wood-inconsistencies by director Suen makes everyone take the descending trip. Even when cop Jason Pai takes center stage and bones are literally broken left and right, you have scenes with a three section staff appearing and it all turns totally baffling. Yep, *Smugglers* has one consistent factor: It's terrible.

**Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1978: Chen Chi-Hwa)** - So, a few of you may wonder about movies that I hold dear to myself. Well, tonight's review will help respond to your unasked question of: In Blake's opinion, what are the top five Jackie Chan movies? Well, I don't want to spoil it for you all, so I'll tell you that *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin* is one of those five. You'll have to ask me for the other ones (or wait patiently until I decide to review them). Oh, let me note here that my favorite Jackie Chan movies don't always reflect my all-time favorite Jackie Chan fights. But we'll get to all that another day.

I think I can say that time has been kind to Jackie's career, especially to his early career. His early films, a lot of which were box-office failures, have gotten the DVD treatment and are getting a lot more respect than they used to. If the IMDB is any indication, then my previous statement especially holds true as several of his old school chopsokey movies have gotten scores above 6.0, which is quite good for a movie like that. They're certainly getting more positive recognition. Even *Spiritual Kung Fu* moved up from a low 4 rating to a 5.7. This may be in response to the low quality of some of Jackie's American output and the increase of special FX that his newer movies have. Whatever the reason, I know that I'd personally rather watch Jackie busting out the old school kung fu moves than hanging around Jennifer Love-Hewitt (she ain't got nothing on Nora Miao), but we'll get into the reasons why afterward.

You know Jackie gets a lot of criticism from MA purists or people who don't find his brand of physical humor amusing. They should watch this film (and some of other early ones) and they'll know that behind his humorous exterior, there's a man who knows how to bust it out. Proving this, this movie starts with a series of martial arts demonstrations by Jackie designed to show us the viewers that a) Jackie knows his stuff and b) this film means business. We get to see Jackie doing a traditional spear form, and then a form with a sword and tonfa, and finally he takes on a pair of dudes armed with spears. Does this have any relevance to the plot? No. Is it cool? Heck yeah! I mean, the first five minutes of this film is Jackie Chan showing off his martial arts prowess to the opening credit music of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. I kid you not.

It's a popular convention: play opening credits to the main actor doing some sort of form or engaging in random combat just to show us how bad he is up front. *Drunken Tai Chi*, *Snake in Eagle's Shadow*, and *Enter the Fat Dragon* are some good examples. Even the 1997 *Death Games* started off with a bunch of random fights with just that purpose. I like these sorts of beginnings...actually, I like to the actors doing traditional forms in movies. To me it's a reassurance that they're the real thing, unless you're Russell Wong from *Romeo Must Die*. Take Jet Li's *The One* for example: my favorite (there we go again with that word) scenes are the final fight (natch) and the scene where the two Jets are doing some traditional pa-kua and hsing-i forms in different locales at the same time. I like that sort of old school stuff.

Anyways, the movie proper begins with the eight Shaolin masters getting together to develop a new style called "The 8 Steps of the Snake and Crane." How do they do this? Group debate? Powerpoint presentation? Diagrams? Scrolls? Nope. They just get into free-for-all and wail on each other. Nice, huh? Anyways, the narrator then informs us that after their meeting, the masters all suddenly disappeared. As there was nobody to "regulate" affairs in the martial world, "chaos reigned in Southern China." That's an odd consequence, as this movie obviously takes place

during the Qing dynasty. Where are all those Manchu soldiers? Aren't they around to control things? Hmm...maybe this was in the beginning of the dynasty before they started cracking down on Shaolin.

So, the filmmakers decide to demonstrate this "chaos" by playing suspenseful music from *The Spy Who Loved Me* (standard chopsockey procedure) and showing an icy river, as if chaos in the martial world affected the weather. We see on the river bank a lone man, Su Yin Fong (Jackie Chan), fishing. He is harrassed by three ruffians called the Ting Brothers. Su calls the three of them a bunch of thugs, which offends them. So, instead of trying to change their image, the three brothers simply try to jump Su and take the Book of the Masters, which they think he has. As you might expect from a man who has the "Book of the Masters" in his possession, he pounds them a good one without breaking a sweat.

Afterward this little skirmish, Su Yin Fong enters town. What town it is, I don't know. As we'll see, it's obviously an important town, judging by the number of bigwigs in the martial world that hang out there. But enough of that. Su makes friends with a dirty little beggar boy. We soon learn from the dubbing that it's actually a girl, which is another common staple of the kung-fu movie: the woman who dresses up as a man and *actually fools people*. As the good people at StompTokyo have informed us: Scenes like these are included to fulfill the requirements of Chinese cinematic law requiring movies to have a mistaken identity subplot.

The two go a restaurant where Su graciously promises to buy the kid a nice meal. The tension is pretty thick at this place and there are a lot of shifty eyes and mysterious people gathered together. A little mishap reveals that Su has the book and soon he's fighting a half-dozen members of the Wu Tang Clan who want the book. After dispatching them, he is invited (at the point of a dagger) to visit "a friend" at the local temple. Being a genial guy, he follows along. Let me remind you that by this point we nearing the twenty minute mark and we've already had four fight scenes.

So Su goes to the temple, where he meets a beautiful lady named Tang Pin-Er (Nora Miao). Her father was the leader of the Tang Clan and one of the eight missing Shaolin masters. She asks Su what happened to the masters, which he refuses to say, declaring that he never does business with women. hehehe As you can predict, this leads to a fight between Su, Pin-er, and her right-hand-man. Su bests the both of them and returns to his inn.

Upon returning to the inn, Su sees a mysterious trio of men that look like the Elementals from *Big Trouble in Little China*. We just *know* that Su will be locking horns with them by the end of the movie, due to the ominous drum music playing in the background when he sees them. Going to his room, he finds that he has a visitor: the beggar kid from earlier now dressed as a girl (which she actually is). I guess she was hoping to charm Su showing her the book, despite looking like she's only 16 years old. Su sends her away with a few witty remarks and is finds that he has another visitor: the leader of the Beggar's Clan. Unless you haven't been paying attention to the previous paragraphs, you'll know what happens next.

I guess it's pretty futile to continue with a plot summary, as the movie is practically made up of Su going to some place and getting into a fight. I suppose this is Jackie's most action-packed film to date, in terms of number of fight scenes. It never got monotonous for me (I'll explain the reasons in a bit). There's really more to the story than simply Jackie fighting. My summary hadn't yet reached the 40 minute mark of the movie. If I continued, I would talk about the various characters introduced, betrayals, friendships, tense alliances formed, schemes, etc. There are quite a few characters and different alliances are formed at several intervals during the film's running time. Fortunately, things never get confusing and it's pretty easy to keep track of everyone.

The movie's plot is centered around the "Book of the Masters," which supposedly has the details to the style that the eight Shaolin masters developed. It's really a MacGuffin, as it really serves simply to get Jackie into numerous fights. This plot device is a very common one in period pieces. Even when the genre was "ressurrected" in the 1990s, movies like *The Swordsman* and *Zen of Sword* revolved around mystical martial arts manuals. It's a genre favorite.

One of the great qualities of *SaCAoS* is the large number of characters. In a lot of serious movies, too many characters would be an instant sign of bad news as it would foretell a convoluted plot. While not a comedy, this movie has a lot of comic touches, many of which come from the quirkiness of its characters. Each character has a signature fighting style, some personality quirk, and some great, witty dubbed dialogue. My favorite is of course Old Lu, who can't say three words without swearing. I honestly found his profanity to be more amusing than say Chris Tucker's in *Rush Hour*. There's also a character who only talks using two syllables and classics like, "Wong Yee Fu, you're a crafty swine."

While still a year and several movies before striking it big with *Snake and Eagle's Shadow*, Chan's charisma is quite apparent. His character is an arrogant know-it-all, but a likeable one. He has a lot of witty one-liners and is really a joy to watch. I think he had a little bit more creative control in this movie, as evidenced in both the fight scenes and the characters. He strikes up a really good rapport with his supporting characters, especially with the tomboy and

Old Lu.

Jackie Chan supervised the choreography and, although it's all serious traditional kung fu, Jackie throws in a few little comic touches. The seeds of his modern stunt-driven action were probably sewn in this movie. He uses his environment a lot to his advantage when he fights in enclosed places, especially in the inn. Tables, benches, signs, and counters are all used to his advantage. He also throws in some acrobatics for good measure. All the fights are choreographed in that old school intricate matter but rarely get really slow.

With so much fighting, it's easy for things to get very repetitive. It does get a little bit, but Chan tries hard to keep things creative. One thing he does is mix up the fights with different one-on-one's, group battles, one-against-several's. Another way is to give everyone a specific style and/or weapon. Tang Pin-Er fights with her flute and a razor-edged handkerchief. Old Lu uses a pipe. The old beggar uses his cane. One clan leader fights with those "stress balls" that you fiddle around with in one hand whenever you're nervous. There are a number of traditional weapons, including a lot of swords (Jackie's fights with the swordsmen are similar to his duel with the constables in *Young Master*) and spears.

Jackie has seldom looked better onscreen. My main complaint against Chan is that he too often plays the "underdog" and lets himself get beat around too much. He does it for comic effect but I think it's too much. This tendency of his really hurt several of his movies, including *Project A II* and *Jackie Chan's First Strike*. They could've been really entertaining movies but are simply pretty good to me. The movie begins with him already bad to the bone, so he dishes out the beatage from square one. In spite of the little touches that would become part of his modern films, he sticks to traditional kung fu including the snake and crane styles, hung gar, and some weapons work for good measure.

The highlight comes during the climax. Jackie is fighting the main villain and their duel is interrupted by those three mysterious mercenary dudes. The main bad guy pays them to eliminate Jackie and thus begins an unbelievable 3-on-1 fight with three guys armed with doubled-sided spears trying to run Jackie through at the same time. The timing, speed, and choreography of this scene is unbelievable. I heard he did something similar in *The Fearless Hyena* so I'm anxious to watch that now.

This is one of my favorite Jackie Chan movies ever. Jackie is out kicking hyde and taking names in a no-nonsense sort of way. There are lots of intricate fights, loads of quirky and entertaining characters, some excellent dubbed dialogue, and a pretty cool storyline. It's old school kung fu and Jackie Chan at their very best. Jackie Chan said that *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin* was his first dream project. Well, it's a dream come true for me too.

*Note: The Tri-Star DVD looks great but has two scenes missing: in the beginning when the tomboy is caught stealing buns. Later, there's a fight scene cut out between Old Lu and the leader of the Flying Tiger Clan. However, the Public Domain EP tape that I used to have had left those scenes in but cut out Jackie's almost intimate moment with Nora Miao, the fight scene between different clans at the end, and the first part of Jackie's final duel with main villain.*

**Snake-Crane Secret (Taiwan, 1976: Wu Ma)** - The story here is pretty bland. It starts off interesting with a cool voice over, treachery and backstabs, but isn't handled or acted well.. It ends up as a pretty generic revenge plot. Although there is close to nothing in the way of decent emotional acting, I found Meng Fei's character to be pretty cool, and Dean Shek played it straight for a decent overall performance.

The only distinct animal styles used are those in the title as far as I can tell. Meng Fei practices the crane style, and does a pretty good job. He uses a mix of pecking or wading hand strikes, and low kicks. I really liked how Tan Tiao Liang's snake style was handled. He basically added his awesome kicking to the regular tripping footwork and precise hand strikes of the snake style. I'd like to note he didn't use any roundhouse kicks, mainly more direct and fast kicks, which went well with the snake style. There may have been small bits of animal style mixed into some of the others' fights, but not enough to mention or clearly make out.

The fighting in the film is average overall. It begins a little slow, and frankly pretty bad. Luckily, about halfway through things speed up, and we get to see more of Tan Tao Liang and Meng Fei fighting; While neither of them showed their best, they both turned in a solid fighting performance. Dean Shek was actually alright in the fights, as was Fang Fang, who put in some good work with a 3 section staff. Unfortunately, everyone else only looked decent when carried by either Meng Fei or Tan Tao Liang. Yu Tien Lung was a weak villain in terms of both acting and fighting. There is a good variety of weapons from swords and staffs to a rope dart and chain whip used to varying effect.

Snake-Crane Secret is just an average kung fu movie. I have seen far worse, and far better. It is really only worth watching if you're a big fan of one of the leads, or to see Dean Shek playing it straight. With that said, I would say it is a good representation of both Animal Styles in its title, but again, it's been done better. A good time killer, nothing more, nothing less.

**Snake Deadly Act (Hong Kong, 1980: Wilson Tong) - a.k.a Snake Fist, Drunken Step** - Plot synopsis- Snake Fist master Yu Yee (Fung Hak On) is determined to kill fellow Martial Artist Ku Ah Pao (Wilson Tong). Ku raped Yu's wife, Yu then assaulted Ku's wife as an act of revenge. When the pair face off Ku realises he's no match for the snake fist fighter and runs away. Years pass and Yu Yee still has unfinished business with his old rival. He befriends his enemy's son and plots to kill them both.

Snake Deadly Act is not the greatest example of independent Kung Fu cinema. But it's still a very worthy entry in the genre despite some of its flaws. It would have been nice to see more of Angela Mao and Chan Wai Man, whose characters seem to disappear from the story. Maybe this film was originally much longer and cut down for the international market?. The Eastern Heroes DVD version I watched clocks in at 1-hour 31-mins. It's presented in Widescreen with burnt on Asian and English subtitles, even though the films dubbed in English. The film's hero is Master Kuo's son Chung played by Ng Kwan Lung. Ng was a Martial Artist who impressed Wilson Tong with his abilities. Tong gave Ng his only starring role and despite a small part in Mysterious Footworks Of Kung Fu he never worked onscreen again. He showcases some nice moves in this film and does a good job considering this was his only real movie appearance. Ng is also very proficient at the animal style his character learns in the film.

"He looks pretty strong, I wonder if his kung fu's better than his fathers?"

Anyway let's move onto the subject of the film's action and the animal styles on display. Not all of the films Kung Fu is animal based. I won't go into this due to it not being the main focus of this month theme. I'm not sure which of the several snake style's this film portrays, or how accurate it is to the real thing?. I've only read about this technique and I don't have any practical experience. Like all old school Kung Fu films I'm sure they changed some stuff to make it more entertaining or work better on screen. There are many styles based on different snakes such as the cobra, python etc. Each style has a slightly different focus depending on what snake is being copied. The old snake fighter uses fluid stylish strikes and deflections to take out his enemies. It gives you the impression the snake style is about flexibility, accuracy and catching your enemy off guard. Veteran Hong Kong actor Fung Hak On is great as the devious beggar character and really puts on a good physical performance. Whilst fighting his character goes for the joints, eyes and groin which is true to the real style. The film features some inventive training scenes with Yu Yee employing some brutal training methods when training Chung. One sequence sees Chung practice his Snake style with bricks tied to his wrist and elbow.

There is another animal based fighting method showcased in this movie. It's not a genuine one but Wilson Tong does a very good job of convincing you the Lobster technique is very deadly. When Kuo is going through the village one day he notices a lobster clamp onto a stall owner's wrist. So being a crazy Kung Fu villain he orders one of his men to buy all the lobsters. Kuo then goes out into the wilderness & builds himself some wacky training apparatus. His training aid would look more at home in a children's adventure playground. After studying the lobsters and attacking his special apparatus like a man possessed. He perfects a whole new style of self defence. When he displays his Lobster Kung Fu in the finale it looks like the Eagles Claw mixed with Snake Boxing. It has a focus on the same targets as the snake style but is more aggressive like the eagles claw. Wilson Tong does a good job handling the fight choreography. I really liked how he switches his style in the last fight. You can see his physicality change as he changes to his new Lobster style. The final showdown is well worth the wait and one of the film's highlights.

Sadly this movie suffers in terms of story even though it could have been something really special if done right. It would have been nice to see more of Chan Wai Man and his shadow less kick technique. Phillip Ko deserved more screen time too as did Angela Mao. Saying that, I've always enjoyed this film and would recommend it to fans of Wilson Tong & Fung Hak On.

**Snake in the Eagle's Shadow (Hong Kong, 1978: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - The Eagle Claw Society, lead by the deadly master Shang Kuan Yi-Yuan (Hwang Jang Lee- Eagle Vs Silver Fox, Secret Rivals), has all but wiped out its rival Snake Fist style of martial arts schools. Young, dumb Chien-Fu (Jackie Chan- Project A, Police Story, Dragons Forever) lives his life a subordinate in the local martial school, constantly taking beatings from its cruel teachers and never getting a chance to learn how to fight. The most he gets are bruises from being a punching bag for the teacher and his



students. One day, Chien Fu helps out an old transient, who it turns out is Grand Master Pai Cheng-Cheh (Simon Yuen- Sleeping Fist, Dance of the Drunken Mantis), the only surviving member Snake Fist style school, now forced to masquerade as a scruffy beggar. The two strike up a friendship and Grand Master Pai begins to teach Chien Fu the Snake Style, just so long as Chien Fu promises to keep it a secret. But, the Eagle Claw school is still hunting for Grand Master Pai and anyone who knows the Snake Style. With the two most likely unable to defeat Shang Kuan Yi-Yuan's style, this isn't good news for Chien Fu and Master Pai... That is, until Chien Fu observes his cat fighting a snake one day.

In addition to being a solid kung fu movie, *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* (1978) is an important first step in the careers of Jackie Chan and Yuen Woo Ping. After Bruce Lee died and left a gap open in the martial film world, Jackie was one of many, many guys the HK studios wanted to fashion into the next big star. Super producer/director/Golden Harvest big-wig Lo Wei tried with Jackie and failed. Of course, at the time, none of the new potential stars really became the international sensation Bruce was, but many found their niche and carved out nice careers. Jackie, on the other hand, was sort of left floating from minor-hit to no-hit never really finding the right vehicle for his talents. He wasn't a handsome leading man, a deadly serious main star, or a capable character actor. So, Lo Wei loaned him out to independent studio Seasonal Films head Ng See Yuen. Under three men, Ng See Yuen, Jackie, and a first time director named Yuen Woo Ping, *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* was born, and it was a hit... The problem was, Lo Wei put Jackie into roles he just didn't work well in, be it the seriousness of *To Kill With Intrigue* or as a villain in *Killer Meteors*. In *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* we get to see the first glimpse of the Jackie Chan character we would come to love, the capable comedian and the capable fighter. Combined with Yuen Woo Ping's penchant for comedy and his excellent eye and knowledge of how to stage a fight, how to use a guy like Chan, it was a match made in heaven, and a match that would spawn this film and *Drunken Master*, forever changing Jackie Chan's career.

Admittedly, I am not a huge fan of the Yuen Clan's often overly goofy (even by HK standards!) comedy. Sure, their action choreography is the reason you watch their films, but there are times when they, especially Woo Ping, go so overboard with buffoonery that it's a big minus, no matter how good the fights. However, despite all the retarded shenanigans and simple minded plotting, *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* still works. Actually, it is sort of like the blueprint, the prototype for the much more fluid *Drunken Master*. Made the same year, *Drunken Master* and *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* are sort of like brothers- Snake the rougher misfit, and *Drunken* the polished older sibling, both taking the same basic master-student training, comedy plotting, and even virtually much the same cast. These films would spawn a huge wave in popularity with master-student kung fu comedies, and Simon Yuen would find himself typecast as the pugnacious kung fu master for the rest of his career. You've got your *Sleeping Fist*, *Snake in the Monkeys Shadow*, *Jade Claw*, *Blind Fists* of Bruce Li, and many more.

A way *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* sets itself apart from the imitators, is in the master-student kung fu films, the master was often cruel and very strict with his student, but here, the two are much friendlier. It's actually really touching when Grandmaster Pai decides to train Chien Fu and one of his rules is, "Don't call me teacher... Because we are good friends." Also in this film, Jackie's character stands out from many of the 'luckless guy who doesn't know kung fu and is trained to be a master' characterizations that preceded and would follow. In most films, the guy is a doltish wimp, who once he masters a technique, becomes confident and of stronger character. Chien Fu, on the other hand, is an idiot before he learns Snake Fist, and is still an idiot after he learns it. As a matter of fact, he is sort of like an idiot savant, since he develops his own technique, 'Cats Paw', but remains the same fool we see at the beginning, only now he is a fool that can fight.

Yes, the story is cloying and convenient (you can say the same of 90% of the Westerns and War movies made in the 50's and 60's), but the fights, training, and little touches make it rise above the rest, make it a classic. Take, Simon Yuen's mastery of the teacup. Jackie doing finger push ups on poles with burning incense below him. The martial school teacher trying to force a compliment on the wealthy magistrates' fat son, "Your boy is shaped like a pig... I mean, a bull." Hwang Jang Lee was always a great villain (though his *Drunken Master* performance which used his big kicking talents outshines this film). The new wave synth score that pops up and Jackie is training, following the dance step-like instructions Master Pai left behind. The goofy cat scream sound effects when he fights in the finale. And the fights...oh, the fights. Even though it's his first film as the main director, Yuen Woo Ping knows how to film a fight, nice wide shots, few close-ups, great angles, and wonderfully timed. The final 40 mins is basically a barrage of fighting scenes, with intermittent plot thrown in between them. What more can you ask for? It's pure take-out-your-brain entertainment.

***Snake in the Monkeys Shadow (Hong Kong, 1979: Cheung Sum)*** - '*Snake in the Monkeys Shadow*' features a rather generic plot and most likely would only have been a very average film if it hadn't been for the involvement of Wilson Tong. Although never chosen to play the leading hero (at least I don't know of any such instance) there's no doubting his skill which was always put to good use in many villainous roles. After some notable supporting

appearances (including the original 'Iron Monkey') Wilson Tong was finally given the chance to show his stuff with this his first starring role and first time as action director. It's hardly surprising he became a firm favourite with fans worldwide making his mark later in such classics as 'The Victim' and 'My Young Auntie'.

As I mentioned the plot to 'Snake in the Monkeys Shadow' is fairly run of the mill and certainly borrows an idea or two from a film with a very similar name that was a hit for Jackie Chan. John Chang plays a young kid, Liang Chi, eager to learn kung fu but without any money to take lessons. He gets a job as a cleaner in a kung fu school and watches the lessons; secretly practising at night. When the master of the school, Drunken Ho, discovers Liang's skill he is impressed and decides to teach him drunken boxing for free. Unfortunately Liang runs into trouble with two rich bullies who, after an argument and a fight (which they lose), hire a pair of snake style expert killers to destroy the school. Only Liang Chi survives and turns to his friend Khoo (Pomson Shi), a master of monkey style fighting, for help.

Although there's nothing too engaging in the story the fight scenes are all well choreographed and build in intensity as the film progresses. The film really shifts up a gear when Wilson Tong finally makes his appearance in the last half hour but the first hour is not without its moments. The film begins with a great duel between Charlie Chan, as a snake style expert, and monkey style specialist Pomson Shi who I don't remember having seen in any film before. His monkey style flips and acrobatics are certainly impressive and a real surprise feature of this movie. The final reel sees Charlie Chan and Wilson Tong join forces against John Chang and Pomson Shi in some excellently crafted fast and furious kung fu sequences. There's nothing here to make it a classic but the film offers solid action that will keep most kung fu fans entertained.

**Snake Prince, The (Taiwan, 1976: Lo Chen)** - A tribe is begging the gods for water as a drought has been plaguing them. Looked at curiously by a trio of snake spirits (the snake prince himself Ti Lung accompanied by Wong Yue and Ng Hong-Sang), they decide to interact with the humans and help them as their mountain has an endless supply of water. The prince falls for village girl Hei Qin (Lam Jan-Kei - Dangerous Encounter - 1st Kind) and this sets into motion first warning that snakes were never destined to mix with humans. Facing violent resistance, betrayal and man showing its worse traits such as greed, along the way they also SING! Yes, this colourful and beautifully designed Shaw brothers production is also a musical. Both beautiful and groovy, combine this with often awkward dance choreography and The Snake Prince is hard to resist on a smile at and with kind of level. Taking dark turns about the hour mark (and boosting its sellable elements by featuring nudity and a human/snake sex scene), director Lo Chen engages quite decently despite seemingly elements clashing. It doesn't hurt that the finale is a full on monster battle with above average snake puppets vs the villagers out for blood. Also with Lam Wai-Tiu and Norman Tsui.

**Snake Shadow, Lama Fist (Taiwan, 1979: Chu Mu)** - A movie feeling like it wants to be impenetrable but in fact it wants success like Jackie Chan had the year before and Snake Shadow, Lama Fist makes that disguise look very transparent and ugly. Accompanied by some of most known pieces from the Star Wars soundtrack, opening credits cartoon versions of characters to be seen in the movie, yes it does go down annoying comedic paths but is mostly a straight faced revenge story starring Chi Kuan-Chun. Good casting as Chi can do the serious face, the serious hurt but no one is attempting any personal depth here. It would've been fine had we understood any motivations or known who anyone is plus there's very little kung-fu action that until the final, decent reel is mostly set at night to boot.

**Snake Strikes Back, The (South Korea, 1982: Godfrey Ho)** - Back from when IFD were Joseph Lai AND Tomas Tang and therefore no apparent ninja craze was present to cash in on, this South Korean martial arts vehicle was brought into the hands of IFD for re-dubbing and possible cutting (but no pasting). The Snake Strikes Back gives that impression, of someone attempting to speed up the already unbearable film so that audiences wouldn't feel like captives for a torturous 90 minutes. As a matter of fact, the Godfrey Ho stamp of approval doesn't change the original so original director along with Ho will get disapproval for a nonsense filled time but approval for the kooky elements present. Elton Chong plays an abused youngster who after some plot incoherency about him being the Master Of Absolutes and bad guys after that title as well as the Book Of Invincible, turns to a big bellied beggar (Mike Wong) for his proper martial arts training. Teaching techniques of working blindly but also channeling the energy hidden in your stomach, here's where the select few minutes of film equals wonderful, especially the finale where Elton graduates (yes, he gets his own deadly belly). A few Eagle Han Ying scenes of legwork are otherwise

noteworthy as well as various Wuxia style weaponry. All in all, one can definitely praise IFD for having the eyes open for the light stuff because it is what makes *The Snake Strikes Back* and possibly sold it. Also re-titled by IFD to *Dragoneer 10 The Remarkable*.

**Snaky Knight Fight Against Mantis (Taiwan, 1979: Cheung San-Yee) – aka Snake in the Eagle's Shadow 2** - Using a few minutes of footage from *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, someone tried to make this seem like a sequel. The original name of this movie is 'Snaky Knife Fight Against Mantis', and it is a decent Don Wong Tao flick. There are a couple of scenes where they show Jackie Chan fighting and I guess this is supposed to link the 2 movies together. Wong Tao is supposed to be playing Jackie, but the best thing to do is to just ignore the Jackie footage when it comes on. The story is already horribly done, and the spliced in footage doesn't help.

The story is very badly done, and not even worth going over. This is one of the rare times that I will not talk about the story at all. It is just pure nonsense, and the editing is some of the worst I have ever seen. The director obviously didn't care about the story. I can forgive a movie for having a bad story as long as it moves along at a good pace and has good fight scenes. The movie is boring, but luckily the fights scenes are really good, and there are plenty of them. The first fight has Alan Chui and some other guy going up against Wong Tao and Carter Wong. If you don't know who Alan Chui is, then I highly recommend checking him out in movies like *Seven Grandmasters* and *Shaolin Temple Against Lama*. He fills up the screen with uncountable movements and is maybe the fanciest screen fighter of all time. It's a shame he only gets about 2 minutes of action. Lung Fei (*Kung Pow! Enter the Fist* and *Death Duel of the Mantis*) shows up next, and this is THE best fighting performance I have ever seen from him, which is saying quite a lot since he has been in well over a hundred movies. I never knew he had moves like this.

If you are not a big kung fu fan, this movie will definitely test your patience. So if you end up just fast forwarding to the fight scenes, make sure you at least watch these- Carter Wong vs. Lung Fei, Chen Sing vs Wong Tao (they fight twice) and Lung Fei vs. Wong Tao (they also fight twice). These fights are worth a watch for any fu fan.

This is a hard movie to rate. The story is about as bad as it gets, but some of the fights are sublime. Don Wong Tao is on fire. I admit that I fast forwarded 20 minutes or so, but if you are a fan of Wong Tao or Lung Fei, you can't pass this one up.

**Son Of The Swordsman (Taiwan, 1969: Joseph Kuo)** - Protecting a valuable cargo on behalf of his adoptive father Wong I-Hsia, Wan Fu (Peter Yang Kwan) has to fight his way through hordes of henchmen belonging to Master Leung. Eventually Wan Fu is injured but is rescued by female swordswoman Pi-Ku. This triggers various revelations and connections the rival families thought they never had...

In my experience, outside of Kung Hu, Joseph Kuo was the only director with any sense of style or tension when depicting the Wuxia world on film. Striking narrative gold with *King Of Kings* the same year, *Son Of The Swordsman* has strengths that makes it climb to an acceptable level as a movie but runs out of steam when the intricate plotting isn't particularly interesting (or surprising to follow). The overall mature intent shines through though and having assured male lead Peter Yang Kwan at the forefront of all this benefits Kuo's frame. The action is also almost extremely plentiful with at times terrific tension and fluidity for its time.

**Souls Of The Sword, The (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung Paang-Yee)** - Attempting some depth about the futile pursuit of supremacy in the martial world (*The Dragon Verse Sword* represents the ultimate key here), Cheung Paang-Yee (*Night Orchid*) certainly provides the ominous and stern atmosphere suitable for the material but the material is pretty lifeless for this on-screen examination of the compelling theme. Simple to follow, the character gallery is still too extensive which doesn't allow for audience investment. Action is relatively sparse, usually competent but also surprisingly sluggish at points too considering the talent involved. Film stars Wong Goon-Hung, Yueh Hua, Phillip Ko and Wang Ping.

**South Shaolin Master, The (People's Republic of China, 1984: Siao Lung)** - As pedestrian as they come when it come to plotting and narrative in a period martial arts vehicle, yet *The South Shaolin Master* escapes entirely without criticism (personally I could've done without such a large character gallery that naturally ends up being barely distinguishable). Director Siao Lung (*Lackey And The Lady Tiger*) superbly utilizes the big look the location of

Mainland China offers up so when dealing with genre staples (such as training sequences), the film is shot up a notch. The true star of the show is the Brandy Yuen co-directed fight choreography that brings a fair mixture between weapons and hand to hand combat with the added advantage of full visibility and crisp movement. Yuen brought something with him indeed as part of that famous family of filmmakers and action directors. Star Yau Gin-Kwok returned for the 1994 sequel, reprising the role of patriotic fighter Lin Hai-Nan.

**South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin (South Korea, 1983: Wu Chia-Chun)** - In 1982, a year prior to the release of 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin', the movie that launched Jet Li into stardom, and triggered a wave of wushu influenced Shaolin movies, captured the imagination of Asian audiences in the form of 'Shaolin Temple'. Made at a time when Chang Cheh's own Shaolin Cycle series had been out of fad since the mid-70's, suddenly Shaolin was cool again, and many filmmakers looked to jump on the bandwagon. This is the background that led to Korea and Taiwan creating a couple of co-productions together focusing on the exploits of the kung fu practicing Shaolin monks, both from 1983, with the other being 'Shaolin vs. Tai Chi'.

While Taiwanese director Wu Chia-Chun helmed 'Shaolin vs. Tai Chi' solo (and indeed, only the opening scene from this movie was filmed in Korea), for 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin', which was shot entirely on location in Korea, it provided star and choreographer Casanova Wong his first opportunity to try sitting in the director's chair. Wong would go on to direct several notoriously unavailable Korean action movies, such as 'The Magic Sword' and 'Bloody Mafia', but 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin' can be considered his directorial debut. Chi-Chun was a logical decision to be co-director, as he'd already had experience working in Korea, co-directing such productions as 'Jackie and Bruce to the Rescue'.

As with almost any Korean kung fu movie, what can be considered to be the true uncut version is an almost impossible discussion to have. A version was shot for Taiwan with additional scenes of the Taiwan cast, and another version was shot for Korea with additional scenes of the Korean cast, then somewhere in between, you have the horrible hybrid that is the English dubbed version. For western audiences then, the plot of 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin' involves two babies who are said to be princes being smuggled away from murderous Qing soldiers, led by Eagle Han Ying. In a scene that doesn't make it apparently clear what happens to the other, one gets away via being throw into a tree (so far, so 'Fury in Shaolin Temple'), and ends up being raised by monks in the Shaolin Temple. Growing up to become Casanova Wong, he's never forgotten his revenge, and intends to kill Han Ying as soon as he's skilled enough to do so.

At this point you may well be asking what the relevance of the title is to what actually unfolds onscreen, so I'll be upfront and say none whatsoever. There is no battle of the geographically opposing Shaolin Temples, so for those looking for some inter-Shaolin action, best stick with 'Invincible Shaolin'. What we do have is the rare sight of a shaven headed Casanova Wong in the role of a monk, and what's more, in one of his first fight choreographer gigs, he decided to move the focus away from his kicks, and instead shift more towards a reliance on weapons. This can again be traced back to the 'Shaolin Temple' influence, which suddenly made the flowery acrobatic flourishes of wushu weapons handling incredibly popular, and the action here clearly shows that influence.

This is the first of 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin's' problems, Wong is a boot master, not a weapons guy. While his trademark kicks are still there, they're never the focus, and seeing his jaw dropping kicking abilities side-lined in favour of only average weapons work is a serious error in judgement. The second problem comes in the form of one of the most irritating cast of characters ever assembled. It begins to become apparent fairly quickly that proceedings are going down the comedic route, but literally every character seems to have gone to the Dean Shek School of Comedy Acting, including Wong himself. I don't consider it too much of a spoiler to say that, when Han Ying mercilessly kills pretty much everyone except Wong, I found myself breathing a sigh of relief as each gurning idiot gets kicked to death on the receiving end of his boots.

Indeed it's fair to say that it's Han Ying who looks the best out of everyone, apart from the aesthetically pleasing dyed red stripe running through the middle of his hair, he's the only martial artist who really gets to show off what he's good at – kicking. The rest of the action delivers entertainment value not so much from its quality, but more the laugh out loud bizarreness of it. As with so many of these movies, the intentional comedy falls flat, but the unintended variety provides plenty of laughs. In the opening scene ninjas, which are clearly mannequins, burst out of the ground bolt upright, thanks to a spring loaded mechanism which would break any real persons back. It's a laugh inducing sight. They then proceed to awkwardly crawl along the ground on their side, in what I can only assume was supposed to keep them out of sight from their targets, but considering they're crawling on a completely clear patch of land, it ends up looking ridiculous.

The ninjas do provide some of the movies most entertaining moments though. After almost an hour of intolerable comedy, there's a scene in which a gang of them ambush Wong, which involves him having to tackle flying ninjas armed with flame throwing blow pipes and bamboo traps. The ninjas finishing move is also worth a mention, which sees them pile up on top of their target, then when they jump off the victim is already buried in an instantly made grave! However these brief glimpses of entertainment are few and far between, and the more 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin' progresses, the more desperate it seems to become. In the latter half we suddenly have random horror elements thrown in for no apparent reason whatsoever. First we have Wong practicing against a dummy that's head is actually a real skull, which is naturally covered in creepy crawlies, but the most bizarre scene has Wong arriving in a deserted funeral parlour in the middle of the night.

Here he's suddenly confronted by 4 long black haired cross dressing ghosts, who seem more interested in getting it on with Wong than they do fighting him, but their advances are treated with kicks to the face. Words are difficult to find to do justice to the bizarreness of this scene, so I'll simply leave it at that. In any case, Wong's visit to the parlour ends with him fending off several flying coffins, all of which have absolutely nothing to do with the plot itself. Most of the scenes also seem to be of the one take only variety. There's a scene which has one of Han Ying's lackeys running over to him in a field to deliver some news, however as he's just a few paces away he clearly almost falls over due to the uneven ground, but it's in the movie. In another during the final battle, two monks are taking on one of the villains, and one of them, obviously meant to be standing out of shot until it's his turn to spring into action, instead is seen simply standing there at the side of the frame.

Events eventually culminate in Han Ying and his four main lackeys heading over to Shaolin Temple, knowing that the monks are harbouring Wong's brother, who grew up to become a prince in hiding. You may be wondering why I'm so casually throwing in a line about Wong's brother turning up, a fairly significant plot point if you consider the synopsis, however it's handled so clumsily that it's barely worth a mention. Not only does Wong never find out it's his brother, but we also never find out what happens to him at the end, he simply disappears without explanation. What it does leave us with, is a 'Shaolin Temple' style finale with the monks taking on the villains. My favorite part of this scene is perhaps what was supposed to be an acrobatic flourish, which sees a row of about 10 monks, all of whom must be about 50 metres from the fight action, decide against charging into the fray, and instead do rolls until they reach the enemy. If there was an award for the lamest attacking tactic ever, this would have to be a candidate.

Wong does of course eventually turn up, which leads to an exhaustive 10 minute one-on-one against Han Ying. This should have been a dream matchup, and indeed Wong gets some of his trademark kicks in – including both the take-three-guys-out-in-one flying kick from 'The Master Strikes', and the awesome over the table flying kick seen in 'Warriors Two', just minus the table. However again the overall focus on weapons make the whole fight fall considerably short of what it could have been. Wong brandishes a 3 sectioned staff for a large portion of it, taking on Han Ying who interchanges between a sword and spear, however his handling of it is so slow that the 3rd staff often ends up dangling limply, or barely completing its rotation around Wong's torso due to a lack of momentum. In the end he simply drops it on the floor, which looks to be more out of relief than anything else.

By the time a fire breathing villain is thrown into the fray, and Wong ends up in a tree fending off ninjas in addition to Han Ying, there's a distinct feeling that everyone is out of ideas. Perhaps the biggest lesson to come out of 'South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin', is that wushu practitioners would be best left to show off their wushu skills, and taekwondo practitioners would be best left to show off their taekwondo skills. While it's admirable to see Wong attempting to break out of the type of roles he usually got cast in for his directorial debut, when it comes to martial arts, sometimes sticking with what you know is best.

**Spiritual Boxer, The (Hong Kong, 1975: Lau Kar-Leung) - a.k.a Naked Fists Of Terror, Fists From The Spirit World** - A pair of fake Jitong specialists (Spiritual healers) Hsiao Chien (Wong Yu) & Master Chi-Keung (Kong Yeung). Spend their time swindling small villagers out of money and food, in return for their non-existent skills. When the pair get separated, Hsiao Chien is forced to change his way of thinking. He ends up in a small village, where the locals are being extorted by gangster Liu Deruei (Chung Shut-Tin). He decides to use his con artist skills, to help the locals fight back.

Liu Chia-Liang's directorial debut is claimed to be the first Kung Fu comedy. While there's plenty of comedic elements, it's hard to say if it was the first real Kung Fu comedy?. The film dabbles with the super natural, in this case a pair of con artists who claim to have super natural powers. Unlike some of the other movies covered in this month's mutual review theme, the occult elements are not taken seriously. It's simply there to make the audience laugh and get our characters into various comedic situations. The film is also light on Martial Arts action, for a Liu

Chia Liang movie that is. Unlike his later efforts, which were far more action orientated. That said, there's still some very nicely staged fight scenes on display in parts.

The movie opens with an occultist played by Wilson Tong, performing a ritual on two boxers, Ti Lung and Chen Kuen Tai in cameo roles. A voiceover tells us that in the late Ching Dynasty, the Emperor of China had heard about fighters becoming immune to weapons of any kind. He requested a demonstration, and this is what takes place at the start of the movie. None of the actors appear again in the film, and it gives you the impression the movie is going to be much more sombre and serious. There's plenty of incense/candle burning along with the usual chanting and burning of scriptures. This allows the two boxers to become immune to their attacker's weapons. Ti Lung attains a chest of steel, when Wilson Tong paints some calligraphy on his back, in thick red paint. Lung then shows that he's impervious to a multiple spear attack. Before flexing his chest muscles, causing the weapons to shatter. If that wasn't enough, the two boxers and their master even withstand being shot by musket fire.

While it's an entertaining opening sequence, it's very different to what follows. It would have been nice to see Wilson Tong's character, feature in the rest of the production. The story really starts when we see Hsiao Chien, and his Master Chi-Keung walk into a small village in the hills. Like so many old-school Masters, Chi Keung has a big love of wine. Soon his knocking back the shots with some locals. While Hsiao Chien prepares for some up-coming ritual, where they plan to fleece the locals. It soon becomes clear that the master has consumed too much of the demon alcohol, and it's down to Chien to perform the ritual instead.

Hsiao Chien is played by Shaw Brothers star Wong Yu, who spent most of his career with the studio. We first get to see Wong's physical skills during his fake spirit possession. Where his character is supposed to be channelling the spirit of the Monkey King. Mumbling some phony incantations to connect him with the spirit world. He does a great job of aping the mischievous mythical Chinese legend. Leaping around onto tables and scaring the local villagers. All except one guy, who's not taking the bait. Luckily Chien's fake iron armour exhibition with a rigged knife, saves him from a beating.

While running from some disgruntled thugs later in the film, he gets away with the help of Jin Lian(Lin Chen-Chi). Like so many Asian productions of the time, our hero thinks that his helper is a boy. Which is kind of understandable at first, as Jin Lian is dressed in loose fitting clothes complete with short hair. However even her lighter voice fails to show Chien her real gender. There was a lot gender switching themes in 1970's Hong Kong cinema. While I'm not going to go into detail about it here. I can only guess it stems from the old theatre/opera days, when men would often play female parts. Chen Chi puts on a fine performance as Chien girlfriend and accomplice. She eventually has a more positive effect on him, making him change his swindling/con artist ways. Not before the pair getting involved in a phony exorcism first.

The pair are asked to rid a mansion of an evil spirit, who has taken up residence there. Like any of the super natural elements in this movie, the ghost is not what it appears to be. It seems Hsiao Chien is not the only con-artist in the area. The actor who plays the ghost, I've never seen before and if anyone can I.D him I'd be most grateful. They eventually team up together and trick the rich family out of some money. Burning more incense, and making someone's head produce flames. This film makes a big point about people being exploited. Especially the much poorer and uneducated members of the rural villagers. Very similar to how the brave fighters of the *Boxer Rebellion*, were led to believe they were immune to weapons. Like I mentioned earlier, the film's hero eventually sees the errors of his ways.

Gangster Liu Deruei's orders his men to bring one of his debtors to him. He orders them to torture the man, with a hot branding iron. Watch out for a young Fung Hak-On playing one of Deruei's right hand men. Meanwhile Chien is looking on, when he can't take anymore he leaps over a wall. Lucky for him, his local reputation as a man with super human ability plays in his favour. Giving him a psychological edge on his opponents. If that wasn't enough, he picks up a hot coal from a fire, and proceeds to chew on it like his favourite sweet. Saving the man from being hurt, he becomes a local hero to the people. Breaking the negative influence that the gangsters had over the people.

The peace doesn't last long, when two of Deruei's friends Shum (*Lee Hoi San*) and Jiu (*Ng Hong Sang*) turn up in town. The pair of killers are highly skilled fighters who see straight through the young hero's tricks. Soon there's a mass brawl involving the crooks and the villagers. With a small cameo from the director himself Liu Chia-Liang, who performs a neat little number of moves on a couple of lackeys. It's a well-staged group fight sequence, as you would expect from a man like Liu-Chi-Liang. The only drawback is the comedy routines outnumber the fights, in this one. Which is a real shame when you consider some of the talent in the movie. Not to mention some of the names who just appear as extras, such as San Kuai, Lam Ching Ying, Eric Tsang, and Danny Chow to name just a few.

Lee Hoi-San (*Magnificent Butcher*) and Ng Hong-Sang (*Dirty Ho*) make a great team of villains, and the pair are on top form here. It would have been great to see them showcase their skills more in this production. With their fight with Wong Yu in the finale being one of the movie's big highlights. There's some nice animal displays from Wong Yu, Leopard, Snake, and Eagles Claw. Only it's a little on the short side, for final fight. Especially when compared with some of the other big finales we see in Shaw Brothers productions.

*The Spiritual Boxer* is an unusual entry in the director/choreographer's filmography. You can't deny the talent on display on screen and behind it. Yet it doesn't quite reach the same levels as Liu Chi-Liang's later efforts, such as *36th Chamber Of Shaolin* and *Dirty Ho*. With this being his first project as director, he was clearly still finding his own style. A stronger story and better pacing, with more focus on the Martial Arts action would have been an improvement. That said, it was nice to see a change of pace in terms of the story and action. It's an entertaining movie, but it's not quite up there with the other Shaw Brothers classics we associate with Liu-Chi-Liang. It felt like it just scraped into this month's theme, it would have been interesting to see a more serious version of the story.

**Spiritual Boxer 2 (Hong Kong, 1979: Lau Kar-Leung) aka The Shadow Boxing** - I really enjoyed this movie. There isn't much action, but solid acting, decent comedy, beautiful sets and locations, and a great dark atmosphere keep it entertaining. Wong Yue and Cecilia Wong had great chemistry here, and I'll be checking I see if they did anything else together. Lau Kar Leung's character was cool, and Lee Hoi San and Wilson Tong were decent as LKL's reliable go-to villains. Gordon Liu stole the show here for me though. He was hilarious in the vampire scenes, and put on a solid fighting performance as well.

The story was ok, but what mainly carried the movie was good acting performances and a great dark atmosphere. The mystery surrounding some characters was fun, and I enjoyed the bit of character background that unfolded as the movie went on. The ending was basically a bad joke, but I liked it in that it was a happy ending, and it was something other than the usual freeze frame of the victory leap after the last fight. The use of fog and dark "creepy" feeling sets and locations was great, aided by generic "spooky" sounding music. I really enjoyed the sets in this, and many of them are darker than I usually see in Shaw films, or Lau Kar Leung films at the very least. The comedy was hit or miss, and my reaction ranged from a blank stare to laugh out loud. Wong Yue and LKL's vampire fists was funny, and Gordon Liu had me laughing a good deal.

While there wasn't a ton of action scenes, the few are good and seem long. The choreography is good but not great from LKL, and some of that has to do with the fact that much of it is using the comical "vampire fist", which I did get a kick out of. Gordon Liu and Lee Hoi San looked really good in the action scenes, and everyone else at least played their part. It's a shame LKL didn't get to do more, because he's a favorite of mine, and I have yet to be less than astounded by his fighting performances. One last note on the action, it seemed a little in characteristic of Lau Kar Leung, but maybe I just haven't noticed it before. There was a lot of use of different camera angles, closer angles, and moving shots with the action.

That brings me to another point. Many things in this movie feel a little uncharacteristic of LKL. Such as the overall dark feel of it, and the sex scene, as LKL's films tend to be more upbeat and family friendly IMO, at least compared to other directors of the time at Shaw. But still, we have a cast of Lau family members and LKL movie regulars, and it's clear he choreographed the action, even if some of the camera styles seemed different to me. (which I may be wrong about anyway!)

Good movie. I came in with low expectations due to reading negativity from others on here, and I ended up being surprised in a good way.

**Spiritual Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1978: Lo Wei)** - According to [Jackie Chan: Inside the Dragon](#), this was produced in 1978 but not immediately released, because it took a few months for Lo Wei to scrounge up the money to do so--it was released that year, while Jackie's Seasonal films were in production. It was his second attempt at a kung fu comedy, following the shelved (at the time) *Half a Loaf of Kung Fu*. It suffers from some large flaws, mainly stemming from the pacing, as it takes 40 minutes for the story to get going and almost an hour for Jackie to do some real fighting. That said, I like this movie far more than I probably should. The fight between Jackie and the Lo Han pole formation is really good (the defunct Wasted Life website included it among their 100 best fights of all time) and I don't think I've seen James Tien do better work than here. That, I'm just a sucker for films that showcase the five animals technique, which is Jackie's style of choice here. The last third or so is gold, but mileage will certainly vary on the rest.

**Spy in the Palace (People's Republic of China, 1981: Wu Pei-Ying, Huang Yu)** - Mainland Chinese kung fu films have often been better than those from HK or Taiwan simply because the attitude is different. Stories are serious (based on Chinese literature). There are no preening 'movie stars', and those who do star are typically serious wu shu players. This very old and appropriately dusty-feeling picture (at least ten years old?) distributed by SMO Video fits the bill. Based on a novel about a Sung dynasty patriot who infiltrates a Kam (barbarian) clan to retrieve a statue, it feels somewhat like some of the very early Shaw pictures. Kung fu is early wu shu (think pre-Jet Li; more basic and not as fancy). Lots of swordplay. Some overuse of slow-mo shots of players somersaulting over things, but I had fun with this adventure.

**Star, The Rogue, and the Kung Fu Kid, The (Hong Kogn, 1977: To Man-Bo)** - This obscure film from the latter part of Leung Siu-Lung's old school career actually turned out to be one of his absolute best, at least out of the movies of his that I've seen. It's supposedly based on real-life events in Bruce Liang's life, although I wonder if there were so many well-choreographed fights in his real life.

The story is pretty simple. Leung Siu-Lung plays a man named Chang, but I'll just call him Bruce for short. Bruce is an action choreographer and martial arts actor on the TV circuit. One day he steps in when an up-and-coming actress, Shen Ming-Ming (a HAWT! Michelle Yim), is being harassed by a bunch of hooligan-types working for a Triad who has his dirty mits in the entertainment industry. Bruce and Shen eventually start spending time with each other, much to the chagrin of Ming-Ming's mother (Wang Lai), a lazy gambling addict who thinks she has the right to make all decisions regarding her daughter's professional future.

Worse than Bruce's potential mother-in-law is the aforementioned Triad boss (Kwan Chung), who probably is given a name, but whom I'll refer to as Weinstein Fong. Fong has somehow determined that his life will not be complete until he beds Ming-Ming, and won't let a low-caste kung fu actor like Bruce stand in his way. Whether it be staging accidents onset, attempted framings or flat out kung fu ambushes, nothing is below Weinstein in his mindless quest to get into Ming-Ming's panties.

There are some dull spots, a few soap opera moments of pure melodrama, and some dodgy editing at the end that confuses how the main conflict was resolved, but for the most part, I was entertained throughout the film's brief 82-minute run time. I did like the pseudo-"behind the scenes" look at making kung fu TV in Hong Kong. Much like Black Belt, there's an interesting scene where Ming-Ming's current studio heads try to guilt-trip her into renewing her contract, which is about to expire. I also find it interesting how kung fu actors are treated by people in the business as a lower caste, as if dating a rich businessman, producer or director was the supreme goal for an up-and-coming actress.

Exploitation fans will get their fill with a random strip club sequence early on, followed immediately by a sex scene between Kwan Chung and Lam Yeung-Yeung, who plays a slutty wannabe actress who thinks she can use her vagina to get to the top (incidentally, Yeung-Yeung's filmography suggest that she quickly got pigeonholed into "sexy" roles in movies like Sensual Pleasures and Erotic Dreams of the Red Chamber). I sort of feel sorry for her character, as she hangs out with the Triad guy and his men all the time, and they never think twice about calling her a talentless tramp who can't act. And yet she sticks around probably because she doesn't feel there's any other path she can make it.

There are a handful of fights, all of which involve Leung Siu-Lung save one, in which Lee Ka-Ting, in a cameo as Michelle Yim's fight choreographer, exchanges some blows with Ku Feng, the wastrel father of one of Yim's co-stars. Leung's kicks are on full display here, and they look great. While he does throw his fair share of Mississippi haymakers, he also does a lot of machine gun punches, and some interesting blocks that look like they were adapted from the snake style or wing chun. There are surprisingly fast and agile exchanges of hand-based attacks, especially by 1977 standards. The finale has him taking on numerous attackers, including Ku Feng and his own little brother, Tony Leung Siu-Hung, who busts out the sai swords. Leung Siu-Lung, instead of wielding the expected nunchaku, uses a chain whip for part of the climax. He doesn't do anything flashy with the weapon, but the change of pace is welcome. I'm tempted to place this above the finale of Call Me Dragon (it certainly beats his work in Broken Oath) because there's less running and better handwork.

This is a particularly rare film, but one worth checking out.



**Stoner (Hong Kong, 1974: Huang Feng)** - It was fairly entertaining, but overall a pretty average affair. The movie was a exploitative basher starring George Lazenby for the most part. Gratuitous but unnecessary sex and nudity filled much of the first half of the film. Lazenby did better than I expected in the fight scenes, but that isn't to say they were impressive compared to other basher style fights I've seen. Luckily there are a few scenes including Angela Mao, and the finale between her and Hwang In Shiek is pretty great, as it always was between those two. The film also had a pretty sweet funky soundtrack that I enjoyed. Ultimately it is the worst film I have seen Angela Mao in, and I don't foresee revisiting it save for the finale any time soon. It isn't a boring watch or a waste of time either, but I'll have to admit the exploitation scenes were a little annoying to me, and those things don't usually get on my nerves.

**Stormy Sun (Taiwan, 1973: Mo Man-Hung) - aka Super Man Chu: Master of Kung Fu** - in the realm of yet another the flick definitely fits but the standard proceedings remains totally watchable despite. We're actually not seeing our heroes during the opening credits but the the vile bad guys that goes on a murder/rape rampage at a local inn. Thankfully an actual hero turns up, the son (Chang Yi) of the murdered family and off he goes on the revenge path. He can make proceedings stormy alright and possessing good eye/hand co-ordination (like so many others in the film, be it when they're using knives or clogging guns by throwing coins from a distance) equals created cinema of the crude but admirably intense kind at times. What's lacking in invention is made by some brief flashes of that intensity and while darkness in this straight effort never registers as truly effective, lead Chang Yi has the chops to carry standards. Some neat, fast paced choreography towards the end involves a samurai and turns out to be the true standout in this department. Also starring Pai Ying.

**Story in the Temple of Red Lily, The (Taiwan, 1976: Karl Liao Chiang-Lin) - aka Battle in Red Temple** - This is one of those films that you always bump into when going through the videos in the kung fu shops here in New York. With its cover of a fierce looking Judy Lee (aka Chia Ling) it is an easy purchase. I have been a fan ever since watching her final amazing fight in Queen Boxer, but have not really followed up on many more of her films. I have had this one sitting amongst a pile of unwatched kung fu videos for ages now, but I am in the mood for some kung fu femme fatales this weekend and where better to start than with Judy Lee.

But perhaps not this film. It is like opening the refrigerator after being away for weeks and discovering that you forgot to throw out the opened carton of milk. This one is a rancid stinker – the kind of kung fu film to make you want to stay away from kung fu films for a while. The plot is unfathomable and the choreography looks to be in sloooooow motion. One would see better fighting in a high school play than here. Truly bad for the most part. It stars – so the credits say – Judy Lee and Tan Tao-liang – but not that you would notice. Tan Tao-liang stops by long enough for a cup of coffee and Judy doesn't really show up until the second half of the film.

The story basically revolves around a group of conspirators – headed by the evil Baron – who have killed all the monks in the Temple of Red Lily and replaced them with their own. Now these monks should be in GQ Monk magazine with their fabulous gold robes and these very large fashionable bells they carry around to kill people with. The Baron also is trying to kidnap the Prince – and as he whispers to his two giggly concubines – “then I will be king and you will both be queens”. They like the sound of that.

Protecting the Prince is a bunch of people with no personalities and an inability to kill the bad guys. They defeat them but can't kill them and so we have to see the same couple of bad guys keep coming back to get beaten up again. Why don't they practice more before getting beaten up again? Now the second half picks up a bit when Judy Lee decides to lend a hand with her brother Tan. Tan Tao-liang throws a few kicks and then remembers that he is making another movie next door and beats it – since Judy has her face on the cover of the video she has to stay.

Her fights are definitely a notch up – but still feel clunky and much slower than she is capable of. Part of the problem is that she has no good competition. She is surrounded at one point by a large party of bell swinging monks – who looked quite deadly in practice – but have the unfortunate habit of running right into the path of her two cutting blades. The final fight is probably the best – as Judy, a small boy with a deadly metal hoop, another good guy and a giant black bird all take on the main bad guy. You have to feel a bit sorry for the villain though because he is out numbered, is about sixty years old and has a huge ugly mole on his face. I don't blame him for bring a little cranky. I always find it interesting that in many of these kung fu films ganging up on the bad guy in the end is considered smart not bad manners as it would in a Hollywood film.

**Story of 36 Killers (Hong Kong, 1971: Kiu Chong)** - Kiu Chong really new how to ape the Shaw Brothers style having worked there so long. The story is a downer, not too different than a Chang Cheh film by the end (Chong is misty eyed when he sees Pai Ying at the end) and Pai suffers like Job. He also kicks a hell of a lot of ass and Tang Ching, usually a jovial hero plays a rotten, arrogant bad guy who keeps throwing his family in harms way to avenge his honor. Jason Pai Piao and Chen Kuan Tai are among the villains and Raymond Lui plays the hero's little brother. Definitely worth checking out.

**Story of the Dragon (Hong Kong, 1976: Chan Wa, William Cheung)** - aka Bruce Lee's **Deadly Kung Fu**; **Bruce Lee's Secret**; **Bruce Li's Jeet Kune Do** - I checked this one out because it promised a showdown between Bruce Li and Hwang Jang-Lee. I got three Hwang fights out of the film, not to mention a chance to listen to some inept dubbing (always a plus) and see some of the ugliest Caucasians ever put in front of a camera.

The movie is wants to be a pseudo-biographical account of Bruce Lee's experience in San Francisco, his attempts to teach kung fu to foreigners, and the creation of jeet kune do. However, the movie comes across more as a remake of *Way of the Dragon* with elements of *Fist of Fury* thrown in.

Wei Ping-Ao basically reprises his roles from those movies as the weasly Chinese helping the foreigners. Carter Wong shows up and tries to stop our protagonist from teaching the Man, but gets whooped (and then whooped again by Hwang).

The fights are pretty solid, nothing great, but nothing embarrassing like I've seen in other Brucesploitation films. This isn't Hwang's best moment; he'd fare better in his later films (including the other six Brucesploitation films he'd gone on to do). Kung Fu fans and people who like to make fun of the films they watch should enjoy this one.

**Story of the Drunken Master (Hong Kong, 1979: Hu Peng)** - (aka **Drunken Fist Boxing**) - *Story of the Drunken Master* is a strange beast. It barely qualifies as a drunken kung fu movie, let alone a kung fu movie. Should we bring the Truth in Titling Act of 1971 into the picture, this movie would be a guilty party indeed. Not only does it skimp on the drunken boxing, it's also pretty low on plot, despite there being only three real fight scenes during the film's 82-minute running time. Even more deceptive about the film is that it was once marketed as a Jackie Chan movie, released on VHS under the moniker *Drunken Fist Boxing*. Of course, this wasn't a Jackie Chan movie in any sense of the word, but that didn't stop the good folks at Xenon from inserting unused training footage from *Drunken Master* into the film, sticking a picture of Jackie from *Drunken Master 2*, and reaping a small profit from gullible newbie fans hungry for anything Jackie.

That last part shouldn't be a detractor from enjoying this film. After all, it has a solid cast including female fighting diva Sharon Yeung Pan Pan, Korean superkicker Casanova Wong, and veteran kung fu villain Yen Shi-Kwan (who played a good bad guy in the Drunken Master rip-off *The Fearless Hyena* that same year). Co-director Ngai Hoi-Fung has done some reasonably entertaining films, like *Young Hero of Shaolin 2* and his frequent choreographer partner Lam Moon-Wah has shown us that when given the right cast, he can be pretty darn good action director. Unfortunately, something went extremely awry while making this movie and the end result is a thoroughly worthless film save the last 15 minutes.

The movie begins promisingly...well, sort of. The famous "General's Mandate" piece begins playing and we get to see Simon Yuen Siu-Tin (*Sleeping Fist* and *The Mystery of Chess Boxing*) perform a drunken boxing routine. Joining him are his three students: Casanova Wong (*The Master Strikes* and *Warriors Two*), Sharon Yeung (*Angel Terminators* and *Angel Enforcers*), and Yuen Lung-Kui (whom I suspect is one of Simon Yuen's sons, considering how much he looks like a thinner version of Yuen Yat-Chor). Lots of acrobatics are performed and Sharon Yeung performs some snake fist. The scene also goes on quite a while, which will set the precedent for almost every other scene in the movie.

After that long opening sequence, we meet a fellow named Cougar (San Kuai) who's on his way to the local casino. As most characters are in these movies, Cougar is a pretty crappy gambler and soon loses all his money. Unexpectedly, instead of leaving the establishment with his head down, he loudly accuses the casino of cheating him, grabs the money, and takes off. A big chase ensues, but nothing really comes of it, beyond us learning that Yuen Lung-Kui's character is a noodle maker by trade.

We cut to a pawn shop, where Cougar shows up and tries to sell a piece of old leather for an exorbitant amount of money. When he starts making a ruckus about it, the shop's owner, Chi Wai (Casanova Wong), shows up and tries to calm him down. A fight breaks out between the two, and then between Cougar and Beggar So (the English dub is interesting in that Beggar So is actually called Beggar So and not Sam Seed). Beggar So recognizes Cougar as the student of Bill Chan (Yen Shi-Kwan), a fellow whom he humiliated years before.

In the next scene we learn that Beggar So's female student, Gam Fa (Sharon Yeung), is a professional entertainer of sorts. She works at her uncle's restaurant, performing acrobatics while spinning plates on her fingers. I hope you like plate spinning, because the film will treat us to several interminable scenes of them, including a long, dull comic segment where Gam Fa shakes off the romantic advances of some rich guy, played by comic vortex Dean Shek.

Meanwhile, Cougar reports back to his master, who appears to be making a living as some sort of extortionist. Bill Chan and Cougar head over to the casino where they strike up an alliance with the casino owner (Johnny Cheung Wa, who made a living playing background thugs in films like *Dragons Forever* and *Fight Back to School II*). Casino guy has the hots for Gam Fa, and Bill Chan is more than willing to help force her into a marriage with the guy, if it means shaming Beggar So. At one point, Bill proclaims that his goal is to show Beggar So just how successful he really is and make die alone.

Now wait a cotton-pickin' minute here! What sort of low-grade kung fu villain has a revenge scheme whose ultimate scheme is to make the good master jealous and lonely? This is a post-*One Armed Swordsman* kung fu movie, not sort of a half-baked soap opera! Now, just stick with me and I'll start assigning blame in a moment.

Bill's first item of business is to get Beggar So's landlord to evict him. Considering that Beggar So is...well...a beggar, I'm sure being homeless isn't really going to screw with his head that much. Casino guy then picks a fight with Gam Fa. Chi Wai steps in and the two give him a nice thrashing. When Bill Chan shows up demanding retribution, Beggar So is forced to dislocate Chi Wai's shoulder in order to save face. This leads to a laughably melodramatic where Beggar So himself almost breaks down into tears when he has to explain his actions to Gam Fa. Apparently our writers wanted a kinder, gentler drunken kung fu master this time around.

Casino boy then shows up at Gam Fa's doorstep, making her father an offer he can't possibly refuse. So now Gam Fa is engaged to Casino dude, much to everyone's dismay, and if her father goes back on his word for any reason, there's going to be good reason to have a fight scene...finally.

Compared to *Drunken Master* and *Dance of the Drunk Mantis*, *Story of the Drunken Master* is incredibly pokey when it comes to pacing. Non-fighting sequences are often dragged out way past the point when the audience stops caring, so unless you like long scenes of people gambling or spinning plates, you're probably going to consult your watch often while watching. Of course, this is worsened by the general lack of fight action in this movie. If you ignore both the training sequences and the Dean Shek cameo, there are really only three fights in the entire movie. Compare with Yuen Woo-Ping's classics about Sam Seed/Beggar So, both of which have three fights in the first ten minutes. This one takes longer than that just to reach the first fight scene, and then another half hour to get to the second.

I'm willing to place the blame for this on co-director Hu Peng. This movie was one of two capstones on Hu Peng's forty-year career, which started in 1939 and spanned nearly 200 films. However, a bulk of those were made during the 1940s and 1950s, including numerous films about Wong Fei-Hung. Hu Peng only made a few films in the 1970s and before this one, his last film had been in 1973. I can only surmise that he was at a loss at how to direct a kung fu movie in 1979 when the rules had changed so much from his heyday. Endless scenes of people talking and women twirling plates around might've easily entertained audiences a few decades before, but by 1979, audiences wanted more. The 1940s filmmaking mentality simply didn't have a place in 1970s kung fu films, even a relatively goofy 1970s kung fu comedy.

The kicker is just how insubstantial the plot of the movie is, considering how much attention it's given. Beggar So is given not one, but three students this time around, but none of them have much personality. Casanova Wong's Chi Wai is practically a non-entity, showing up mainly when there's a fight to be had. Sharon Yeung's character a bit more meat, even though she spends good portion of her non-fighting scenes weeping, which is unbefitting a kung fu diva, save when her father, husband, or son is killed. The other student just sort of takes up space when you get right down to it.

Hu Peng's lackluster direction also robs the film of any forward momentum. There's no sense of rising action in terms of what Bill Chan does to Beggar So. In a better movie, the villain would persecute the hero at every turn. By the time the movie reached the climax, we'd all be rooting for the protagonist to break every bone in the guy's body. In this movie, Bill Chan's attempts to torment his foes are met with a strangely casual attitude. I'm pretty sure that

Ngai Hoi-Fung only stepped in order to give the film a bit more energy after the producers saw what Hu Peng was doing.

Even the training scenes are almost completely botched. Action directors Lam Moon-Wah and Liu Hok-Ming stage the training sequences competently, but they completely disengaged from the plot itself. There's no training for revenge or redemption or anything like, nor are we given any motives as to why or how Beggar So got these particular students. The film simply cuts to random scenes of Beggar So training with his students at random intervals with no regard whatsoever as to how they connect with the preceding scene. It's also bit strange for a film about Beggar So with the word "Drunken" in the title to not have any drunken boxing training.

That said, it must be pointed out that there's almost no drunken boxing whatsoever in the movie. After Simon Yuen's initial demonstration, the style only shows up during the last fight, when Yuen Lung-Kui inexplicably gets drunk and starts using it on Yen Shi-Kwan's mantis boxing character. There's nothing explicitly wrong with its execution, but it feels shoehorned into the fight, as if Lam Moon-Wah and company just had to do it, not because it really had a place in the action.

The final fight is the only worthwhile part of the film. I'm sure that Ngai Hoi-Fung was more actively involved with this portion of the film than he was the rest. Casanova Wong, aka The Human Whirlwind (not to be confused with the Human Tornado, played by Rudy Ray Moore), is known for his fast and furious spin kicks. They get some showcase here, and it's a bit ironic that a Korean superkicker is the hero instead of the villain here. Watch for a aerial kick that starts as a splits kick and ends in a flying front kick. Casanova gets to take on Johnny Cheung before teaming up with the others against Yen Shi-Kwan. Sharon Yeung's acrobatic snake fist is a lot more entertaining to watch. But then again, Sharon Yeung is infinitely more fun to watch than Casanova, what with his limited acting abilities, hairstyle that was popular back in Ancient Egypt, and strange-looking face. Simon Yuen does get to fight a bit, too, even if he is obviously doubled for the acrobatics. Yen Shi-Kwan's mantis style looks great, a nice compliment to the Eagle Claw he used in *The Fearless Hyena*. At one point, he uses his belt as a rope-dart, which is actually pretty cool. The choreography is occasionally cheapened by some undercranking, but Lam Moon-Wah and company do a good enough job that you wonder why their talents were wasted so much during the first hour.

**Story of Thirty-Six Killers (Hong Kong, 1971: Kiu Chong)** - Meng Liang's (Pai Ying) brother kills a young noble and his men, who have killed some villagers, in order to save a young lady. The young noble's father, Master Lo, offers 100 taels of gold to get all the Meng's heads and they have to leave the town. Meng Liang meets one of the killers, a well known swordsman called Li Hao and this one gives him his words that he'll give Meng Liang three days in order to settle his things before chasing and killing him. When Meng Liang, his mother, his brother, his wife and the young lady his brother has saved arrive at his uncle's house, this one and his son have disappeared. At night, Meng Liang's cousin returns and tells him that his father is prisoner in Lo's house and the three boys go to free him. During the fight with Lo's and his allies' men (among which there is Tang Ching), they discover that the nobles are plotting in order to get rid of the king and they rob a secret message. As he has decided that he will be the only one allowed to kill Meng Liang, Li Hao helps them to escape, but when they are chased by Tang Ching's men, Meng Liang's mother, his brother and the young lady are killed, while his wife is kidnapped.

Finally Meng Liang succeeds in taking revenge for his whole family. It's a very good movie, with good fights, sometimes with amazing weapons such as cymbals used by Tang Ching's men, while this one uses a sword with little bells. In secondary roles as two of Tang Ching's sons, we recognize Chen Kuan Tai and Pai Piao (without their moustaches !). This movie is worth watching.

**Story of Wong Fei Hung: Part one (Hong Kong, 1949: Wu Pang)** aka *Whip Extinguishes the Candles*. The Wong Fei-hung films starring Cantonese opera star and martial artist Kwan Tak-hing was one of the most successful and long running movie series of all-time -- written accounts vary the amount from 76 to 99 entries. Hung Gar practitioner Wong Fei-hung is the most well-known and revered Cantonese real-life folk hero. Post-World War II had seen many newspaper serials written by Chu Yu-chai and radio broadcasts with him as a hero of fictionalized stories. Director Wu Pang used a story from Chu to show off a Southern style of martial arts. The film would not only have interludes where the martial art consultants such as Chan Hon-chung would show off their skills, it starts off with a lion dance and even later has a dragon boat song (Southern style song with drum or gong) performed by Chao Fei-fei. The film would help make the venerable Kwan a star and typecast him as the Confucian and stalwart *sifu*. It would also bring in authentic martial arts onto the screen and showcase master and student relationships. This just might be the most influential Hong Kong movie on the martial arts genre.

**Stranger and the Gunfighter, The (Italy/Hong Kong, 1974: Antonio Margheriti)** - Now how do you come up with this one? I really don't know, though I'm glad they did. The plot to this East Meets Wild West kungfu spaghetti Western is only the beginning of the delirium that it assaults us with. Things just keep getting stranger and more over-the-top, and I have a feeling a goodly amount of hashish was available to those dreaming up this absolutely ludicrous and thoroughly enjoyable romp.

For about one week, Lo Lieh was the biggest thing in martial arts films. When Five Fingers of Death opened in America, it was a smash hit, and the sour-looking hero was an overnight sensation. Then Bruce Lee came along, and Americans realized you could have a kungfu hero who was bad-ass and beautiful, so Lo Lieh's five seconds in the limelight were over.

Luckily, the Italians didn't forget about the Shaw Brothers martial arts superstar. They called upon his skill as an actor and all-around bad-ass for this film, co-starring alongside the baddest man to ever stroll through the Western genre, Lee Van Cleef. This website digs Lee Van Cleef. Even though he made that Master Ninja crap alongside such big-time martial artists as Timothy Van Patton, Demi Moore, and Crystal Bernard, no one here holds that against him because he is just so god-damned cool.

When I first saw The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly it was Van Cleef's sadistic character, Angel Eyes, that was my favorite. He was so subtle and so evil without even seeming like it. Westerns starring Lee are always my favorites, and I regularly devour such gems as Sabata, For a Few Dollars More, and Death Rides a Horse.

Here, he plays his usually character, which is a sly and charismatic gambler/gunslinger. His first moment in this film is utterly priceless, as he does the classic "disappearing in the steam" exit to befuddle some railroad lackey. From there, he promptly sets out to rob the bank.

Also in town is a diminutive Chinese man who seems to have sexy mistresses scattered all over America. Each woman gets to show off her healthy, 1970s unscrawny booty during this whole opening montage. Ahhh, those were the days. Back when a woman had a little meat on her and no one was all upset about it. This age of heroin-overdose looking supermodels must end. Give me some back any day over those flat non-rumps people seem to dig.

Anyway, the Chinese guy catches on that Van Cleef is about to rob the bank, and runs over there to keep him away from some valuable stuff. Unfortunately, he runs in right when Lee's dynamite goes off. Then, The Law shows up, and Van Cleef is charged with murder when all he really wanted to do was rob the bank. And the kicker -- all that was in the vault was a fortune cookie and pictures of the guy's naked mistresses.

Meanwhile, over in China, we find out that this old Chinese guy was a rrelativeof Lo Lieh's. The Chinese government (which was actually Manchurian at the time) is pissed that old Wang died without telling them what he did with all the money he took with him to America. The send Lo Lieh to find it so he can repay the government. If within one year, he isn't back with the loot, his family will be killed.

Back to America we go, where Lee Van Cleef is about to be hanged for murder. Lo Lieh shows up, finds out he was the last one to see his uncle alive, and saves him. Together they ride off to solve the mystery of the missing treasure.

And here's where the plot really kicks in. Old Wang tattooed clues to finding the treasure on the butts of each of his mistresses. Yes, to find the booty, you must find the booty. And that, my friends, is the plot of this film. Lo Lieh and Lee Van Cleef ride around looking at women's asses. Nice work if you can get it.

Of course, it's not all fun and games. They are pursued by a crazy religious fanatic who has a mobile church tied to a team of horses! And he has one of those standard issue sidekicks: the giant super-strong native American dude. The black-clad Deacon wants the treasure so he can build a real church and expand his heretic-murdering business.

All sorts of wild stuff ensues, peppered by healthy doses of comedy. The soundtrack is lame, and every time Lo Lieh jumps, he makes a sound exactly someone messing around on a slide whistle. I guess that's one of them Shaolin powers we hear so much about, the ability to go, "Whoooolooloolooloo!" when you jump. He should team up with David Chiang and his "Chooka chooka choo!" sound effect from Seven Blows of the Dragon. That would sound nice.

The dippy soundtrack is my only complaint about this film. Everything else rocks me like a hurricane. Most of the action consists of Lo Lieh beating up unsuspecting whities. He espouses a little Confucian wisdom and knows acupuncture, which is more or less par for the course. Lee Van Cleef mostly sits back and enjoys the show, occasionally shooting someone. I guess he has this job where he gets to ride around with a seemingly indestructible kungfu dynamo, looking at women's asses, and collecting treasure at the end. What's not to enjoy? I wish I was Lee Van Cleef, only still alive.

There are no great kungfu battles, since no one else Lo Lieh beats up knows kungfu, but there is plenty of action culminating in a totally wild finale in which Lo Lieh's new love (a Chinese woman, formerly one of the ass women) is

suspended above a raging fire while Lo Lieh fights the big native American guy and Lee Van Cleef rides around with a Gatling gun shooting up everything in sight!

A lot less grim than the violent Fighting Fists of Shanghai Joe, and more along the lines of the wacky Joe sequel, Return of Shanghai Joe, this is one hell of a film. Plenty of kungfu action, bad funk music, naked asses galore (yay!), shootin', punchin', kickin', drinkin', gamblin', and everything else that makes life -- and this film -- great!

**Stranger from Canton (Hong Kong, 1973: Yeung Man-Yi) - aka Stone Cold Wu Tang; Karate Killer; Hand of Death -** Only the martial arts expertise of Jason Pai Piao can stand up to the might of the Manchurian pig-tailed prodigal, whose braid is his weapon of total destruction.

I had no idea what to expect before watching this movie. I have never heard of it and did not know anything about it.

This movie starts off with the first 12 minutes in the dark, making it a little hard to see what is going on, but not bad enough to where you are just relying on the audio to distinguish what is taking place. During the first 12 minutes there was some action, more killings and violence than your normal kung fu display. For the most part, the story is about those corrupt Manchurians always up to no good, having to deal with a man, just back from "the states", getting in their way. The story in this movie was lacking any real emotion, it did not bring me in as other movies I have seen did. It got to the point where all I was doing was looking forward to the next fight scene, to see if it would be better than the last. They were pretty much about the same. The main bad guy in the movie used his hair as a weapon, more like a whip that would cut his opponents with ease. Is this a movie I would ever watch again, probably not, but am I glad I got to see it at least once, of course. It also could have been that I wasn't in the proper mood to watch such a film. There was plenty of action, but because of bad editing, frame skipping, and pauses throughout the DVD maybe due to bad authoring, it really was quite a chore to get through the entire film. I do have to say, one of the best elements to this film, which actually helped me get through it, was the dubbed voice used for Jason Pai Piao's character, CLASSIC!

The action is plentiful, just not all that spectacular. Average at best. The main bad guy's hair used as a whip was the only exciting aspect to the choreography to begin with, and even that was a bit tame. Not all that original of choreography, it just didn't offer anything new or different over the hundreds of average kung fu movie out there.

Standout performance in this movie goes to the main star of this film, Jason Pai Piao. He reminded me of David Chiang in the Shaw Bros movie Vengeance!. The power he uses when even making just a simple jab, or counter strike was forceful and hard hitting. He did not talk too much when it came down to kicking some ass, he just kicked ass and took names later. When he did have something to say, he was very cocky and confident in his skills, which are always good characteristics to have in a kung fu movie, makes it more entertaining.

**Stranger From Shaolin (Taiwan, 1977: Tommy Loo Chung) -** Wong Hang Sau gives a believable portrayal of kung fu legend Yim Wing Chun, the supposed founder of the Wing Chun fighting style.

When her entire family is killed by the occupying Manchus, Yim Wing Chun (Wong Hang Sau) narrowly escapes to Shaolin temple. Disguised as a man (it seems that back then all women had to do was wear men's clothes and everyone was instantly fooled) she persuades the abbot (who bears an uncanny resemblance to the landlord from UK sitcom 'Time Gentlemen Please') to let her stay and is given the job of fetching water from the well for the students.

This 'job' is actually the start of her training which builds up her strength and, as she frequently has to climb to the bottom of the well, teaches her to work in confined spaces. Wing Chun begins to teach herself kung fu, from secretly watching the abbot, incorporating her own techniques into a new style ideal for close quarter fighting. The other monks soon realise that she is not quite the man she says she is but by that time strong bonds are formed and they are supportive of her mission for revenge against the Manchus, especially as they learn that the Manchus intend to attack Shaolin.

Wong Hang Sau is excellent in portraying Wing Chun as a character with determination and is also effective in the fight scenes. While the Wing Chun technique looks authentic (at least to my untrained eyes) in the training sequences, the actual fights themselves are a little more flowery which is only to be expected when the intention is to depict an exciting and visually impressive fight scene. The other members of the cast all perform well and the

only minor disappointment is that Bruce Lai appears in a largely non-fighting role. He is given the chance to make a small homage to Bruce Lee in his first scene though which sees him training in the courtyard at Shaolin.

The final fight scene is plagued by continuity errors such as when the weather suddenly changes from a nice sunny day to snow and then back to being sunny again. Also when the fight against General Kang begins Wing Chun has two companions, by the end of the scene though, one of them has disappeared. This all points to a drawn out production schedule and maybe not all actors were available for all of the shoots. The continuity errors are only minor niggles however as, on the whole, the film is a relatively accomplished production.

**Strife for Mastery (Taiwan, 1982: Raymond Lui)** - David Chiang steps back into the 'knight errant' role in which he rose to fame in his early days at Shaw Brothers. This relatively accomplished independent feature sees the kind of plot twists and intrigue typical of a Chor Yuan epic but the characterisations are not so strong.

To be honest, the film fails to live up to the classics of years previous and plot devices seem more than a little contrived with characters pulling off masks and wigs to reveal their true identities in a manner almost reminiscent of 'Scooby Doo'. Fight scenes are fast and fluid, primarily focusing on swordplay but offering some more exotic weaponry to spice things up a bit. Undercranking is evident on occasion but fortunately is kept in check for the most part. In keeping with its time, there is plenty of tumbling and acrobatics and with the likes of Mars involved in arranging the action, the fight scenes are suitably impressive.

**Struggle Karate (Taiwan, 1971: Kim Lung, Jeon Beom-Sung)** - It was a struggle alright. Struggle to understand (I watched the Turkish-dubbed version), a struggle to figure who played who, and a struggle to enjoy. The movie was released a good two months before *The Big Boss* set the bar to dizzying new Heights, so this film is understandably crude in comparison. It's also cheap, drab, badly-edited, and just a crappy film all around. Aficionados might find a certain charm in it for all those reasons.

Wong Yung (the *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre* films) plays an enforcer for a local crime boss (Yee Yuen, who often played a Japanese heavy) who carries out an assault on a local school. Everybody is murdered except the master's daughter (Cheung Ching-Ching, whose short career included *Champion of the Boxers* and *One-Armed Swordsman*), who's taken captive. Wong Yung is having women problems with his girlfriend (Qin Mi, whose career was even more short-lived, the only other martial arts film she made being *Extreme Enemy*). I guess to shore up his prospects with her, he saves the daughter from his boss's cronies and sets her free. The act of defiance becomes full-on rebellion once they kill his girlfriend. Thankfully, he has the dead master's daughter, her brother, and their friend to back him up.

With regards to the title, there is a scene where the bad guys are beating/torturing the brother character, including five guys dressed in karate gis. Strangely enough, they disappear from the film after that scene, including the finale.

The film is almost non-stop basher action. We know what that means: Everybody kicks low and without power. Wong Yung throws scores of Mississippi Haymakers which are apparently enough to kill people in a single hit. Everybody has bionic legs and is capable of jumping like the Hulk. Cheung Ching-Ching uses lots of backfists and chops in her fights, although they lack any sort of real intensity (being pre-Bruce Lee, I can't complain too much). I don't know who the action director was, although I'm guessing it was Wong Fei-Lung (*Story of the Dragon* and *Shaolin Deadly Kicks*), who plays one of the bad guy's main henchmen. His work in those films was pretty solid, but here he was probalby learning the ropes. The fight editing is horrific, with the settings changing from forest to mountain to Lord-knows-where-else in between cuts.

Musical cues are taken from *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and from Akira Ifukube's backlog (re: the guy who scored Godzilla and other Japanese sci-fi films). In the end, it's a bland affair and mainly a curiosity for people who want to see what pre-Bruce Lee films were like.

**Struggle Through Death (Taiwan, 1979: Cheung San-Yee) - AKA Duel Of Death, Dragon Fighter** - Average Kung Fu flick Starring rubber legs John Liu. one of a few men to defeat Chuck Norris in open competition. Liu was a big star in Taiwan where he made this film and many others. A student of fellow actor Tan Tao Liang (The Hot The Cool The Vicious), he is known for his unique and impressive kicking skills.

The film's basic plot revolves around a gold mine run by your usual moustache-clad bad guy who loves supping tea. Liu is kidnapped and forced to work in the gold mine run by the villains. The conditions are so bad they simply kidnap people rather than advertise job vacancies in the local paper. Wie Ping Ao appears in the film, a well-known Hong Kong character actor. Well known for his role as the Chinese translator in *Fist Of Fury* and the camp mafia man in *Way Of The Dragon*. Unlike his usual villainous role here he plays a good guy who helps his fellow workers. *Dragon Fighter* is not anything special but slightly different to many of the films churned out at the time. We don't get to see the hero do his thing until an hour into the film, as he slowly learns his Heaven Legs technique. Once he's mastered the style all hell breaks loose and he goes about kicking the spit out of everyone.

Oddly one of the cast members has been named Fuck Chueng which surely must be a joke. The version I watched is called *Dragon Fighter* released on the Hollywood DVD label. It's a poor full screen cropped print with some very bad audio in the finale. Had to laugh at the use of the *Jason And The Argonauts* soundtrack in certain scenes. One to watch for fans of 70s chop-sockey flicks and John Liu otherwise avoid it.

**Sun Dragon (Hong Kong, 1979: Hua Shan) – aka Hard Way to Die** - "The Best Chinese Kung Fu Fighter" Billy Chong plays Shao Chong, a Chinaman who flees his homeland after beating up the mayor's daughter, who was trying to rape some random girl, which cinematic experience has taught me was a frighteningly normal occurrence in any time period in China. Shao Chong apparently has a grandfather in living in Arizona, so that's where he's headed. He ends up working at a Chinese-run saloon (did those ever exist) where an old friend works. At the same time, three outlaws ("The 1979 World Kickboxing Champion" Louis Neglia, "Principal, School of Chinese Kung Fu" Ma Chung Tak, and "New York Kung Fu Instructor" Joseph Jennings) arrive at a homestead belonging to a black family. They kill the family, save Tommy ("The Leading American Kung Fu Fighter" Carl Scott), and set the place up as a hideout until the right time to divide and spend the money. Scott is nursed back to health and trained in kung fu by a kindly Chinese doctor (Leung Siu Chung) and goes out for revenge. When violence reaches the saloon, Shao Chong gets involved, too.

This is almost an Ed Wood movie in terms of visionary and budgetary overreach, not to mention bad plotting, horrible history and, though not *Hua Shan's* fault, some of the worst dubbing on record. Where else would you find a film set in the Old West, but with guys hanging around in blue jeans, tank tops, sunglasses and 70s hairdos? The idea of a Chinese guy owning a bar complete with a white prostitute frequented by white guys in the late 1800s is ludicrous. And the frequent appearances of power lines and an entire fight scene set at a modern mining complex? I also found it interesting that the only people who come across as racist are the Chinese: they are the only people who hurl racial epithets at Carl Scott during the movie.

It's completely saved by the frequent fight scenes choreographed by Leung Siu Chung, father to Bruce and Tony. The fights are fast and furious and Billy Chong gets a superb showcase here. He kicks like an SOB and his handwork is quite simple, as if he was trying to be the next Bruce Lee (I'm pretty sure he was primed as such at the time). His kicks are more along the lines of Bruce Leung: not really flashy like Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee or hyper-flexible like John Liu and Dorian Tan, but executed with snap and speed, with good height on his jumping spin kicks. And the filmmakers made it a point to fill the movie with talented fighters, most of whom complement Chong nicely. There are probably a few too many Mississippi Haymakers thrown by the white guys who should know better, but within the "historical" context, whatever.

The animal style part comes courtesy of Carl Scott and Leung Siu Chung, as the latter teaches the former the Panther style. Outside of *Two Wondrous Tigers*, I don't think I'm aware of any other movie that gives so much attention to the Panther style on an individual level. We get to see both actors performing Panther forms on several occasions and they look great. Carl Scott gets to use it in three fights, including the finale. The movements are fast, short, and snappy, with his panther strikes doubling as blocks, which is normal in the style. The main disappointment is that Scott complements too much of his style with kicking, which is unnecessary, since they already got Chong to be the bootwork delivery system. Kicks in the style tend to be low, which clashes with the high boots that Scott performs (admittedly quite well). I would've preferred that Scott be the Tino Wong Cheung to Chong's John Liu (which would make sense, since Tino used the panther in *Secret Rivals 2*). In the end, it's still a great movie, fight-wise.

**Sunset in the Forbidden City (Taiwan, 1976: Lin Pai)** - This is the last of the obscure, early Tan Tao-Liang movies that I'll be reviewing for the time being. Tan Tao-Liang plays a young martial artist who goes to the manor of a



nobleman (Ma Kei), presumably in Beijing/The Forbidden City--could it be Pu Yi and could this be set in the early days of the Republic following the fall of the Qing Dynasty? I'm not sure, since I watched the film in Mandarin without any subtitles. Anyway, Tan works alongside an elderly kung fu master (frequent collaborator Mang Chiu-Fan) and his badass tai chi master wife. Tan ends up falling in love with a Peking Opera performer (Chia Ling, aka Judy Lee), whose troupe is actually a group of rebels. He eventually discovers that his employer is a bad guy and sides with the good guys.

There's a lot of intrigue and political/historical goings-on in this movie, but because of the lack of subtitles, it was all lost on me. There isn't a whole lot of fighting in this movie, and what we get isn't bad, but not up to the standards of Tan's previous two movies, or his Sammo Hung-choreographed films from that same year. He does do one new move here, which predates Donnie Yen's No-Shadow Kick sequence from *Iron Monkey*, where Tan roundhouse kicks an opponent (played by Lung Fei) about twenty times in the head and chest without ever lowering his leg. Judy Lee shows off her actual Peking Opera training early on, but doesn't really fight until the finale, when she briefly tussles with Cliff Ching, who was in *Conspiracy of Thieves*. I liked the old tai chi woman, who successfully strangles one of the main bad guys to death, even after getting stabbed in the back and shot in the stomach. \*That\* is the definition of badass.

**Super Dragon (Taiwan, 1976: Cheung Chun)** - A nice ensemble cast in this above average tale which has two stories running at the same time. One of Polly Kuan's character - the fierce Miss Wang who is out to discover who killed her father and the other main plot revolves around 5 members of an Escort Union who are given the mission to transport some precious loot.

When the loot goes missing, some members of the Union bump into Miss Wang at a tea house. She appears rude at first but soon tags along as it seems as though the person who stole the loot may indeed be the same person who killed her father.

If the plot sounds interesting, I have to say that for the first half at least, the way the script and story unfolds it is a tad confusing and not particularly gripping. The film takes a while to warm up and is not helped by not having a strong main lead character - there are many top stars in the film but most are restricted to supporting roles. After the first 30 mins, the remaining bulk of the film is given to Polly Kuan, Cliff Lok and John Chang who do a good job, with Polly Kuan stealing almost every scene she's in.

Support comes from the reliable Yueh Hua as one of the Escort union members, Lo Lieh who is ridiculously under-used and his appearance about an hour into the film is merely an extended cameo. Philip Kao Fei who disappears from the film after the opening scene returns for the final showdown and gives a sterling if brief performance.

I have to say that the final climatic fight scene is a good one and well worth the wait. In a concept not dis-similar to Red Phoenix (also starring Polly Kuan, Lo Lieh & Yueh Hua) a mysterious Gold masked assailant who has been bumping off members of the cast confronts our heroes at Tiger Hill, where after much carnage the traitor is eventually unmasked and I have to say that the revelation of who it is was quite a surprise and refreshingly plausible.

So while not containing a great story, the fights (as bloodless as they are) come thick and fast and the film is never boring. Throw a few nice touches in like ninja's that ambush Polly & John Chang by bursting out of the sand and you have some enjoyable, if a little rough around the edges entertainment.

**Super Gang, The (Hong Kong, 1982: Wong Siu-Jun)** - Two rival gangs driven by greed and revenge, fight for wealth, power, and respect. On the hard streets, and in tough back alleys of early 1980's Hong Kong. Can two friends from opposite gangs, Alan(Bruce Le) and Kenneth(Wong Yuet-San) survive the fast paced living of organised crime?.

Contemporary Martial Arts action from the Filmark studio and director/script writer Wong Siu-Jun, credited as Yellow John in the movies opening title sequence. Not sure if that was some bizarre racial slur from the distributors? or just lack of interest in translating the original credits for the Western market?. Like so many Filmark productions, the story is vague at best. The film starts out as a simple revenge movie, but as the run time goes by, it's clear the directors were trying to tell too many stories simultaneously. Bruce Le(Hung Kin-Lung) is often credited as the movies star, on posters, VHS/DVD covers, but he takes a back seat for some of the movie. With actor Wong Yuen-San(Little Superman) taking centre stage for most of the proceedings. Korean tough guy and all round super-kicker

Kwan Yung-Moon also takes up a lot of screen time, as gang leader Hung Wing Man, or Mr Han as he is referred to in the English dubbed print.

The movie opens with a strong free for all brawl, that takes place in a flashback sequence. Alan(Bruce Le) has returned from Holland, to find one of his fellow gang members has been murdered. While the actions not intricate or flashy, it's got a lot of energy and the fight feels genuinely desperate at times. It's a decent enough introduction to Kwan Yung-Moon and Bruce Le's character. Sadly, the rest of the movie doesn't really build on this. The editing is sometimes way off, with fights suddenly appearing to start mid-way through. There may have been some changes made, for the international release?.

The fight choreography duties were handled by Bruce Le, Chong Wai(Two On The Road), Ng Kit-Leung(The Disciples Of Shaolin Temple). Le was the most experienced of the three, with Wai and Kit-Leung only working on three movies as action directors. One of the movies positives, is they haven't gone for the Little Dragon, blood tasting, nose ,swiping hyper kinetic style. It would be wrong to lump this movie in with the Bruceploitation genre, its only real connection is the fact Bruce Le is among the cast. There's no nunchaku swinging or nods to Bruce Lee movies at all, which is a refreshing to see. Sadly it's just not done with the same flare as some of Le's other movies of the era, Bruce Against Ninja and Challenge Of The Tiger being good examples. While I've seen far worse, the choreography really should have been much better for a movie of this era. It's a throw-back to the basher style of the early to mid-70's, in some respects. At the same time, some of the action cannot be categorized that simply.

One of the movies highlights for me, is the presence of multiple Mr Hong Kong winner Bolo Yeung(Real name Yang-Sze). When one of the crime gangs decides to spring a surprise attack on their rivals. They end walking into a set-up, when the lights come on, up pops Bolo and Co. The ensuing fight is not the best-ever, but it's one of the movies more entertaining moments. Each gang member is armed with a large blade, and all hell breaks loose in a close quarters scuffle. Bolo looking as big as Hong Kong island itself, makes for an intimidating figure, even more so when he's swinging a knife at you. Like so many of Mr Yeung roles, they could have given him a lot more screen time.

While Bolo's role in the story might not be that lengthy, he does appear in two of the productions more memorable scenes. We next see the Martial Arts Mr Universe jogging up a hill in some urban section of Hong Kong. He's even got his real-life initials Y.S. emblazoned on his jacket top. Long term Kung Fu genre fans should know, that if any character goes for a jog, he's most likely, going to literally run into trouble. The trouble comes in the form of Kwan Yung-Moon, after only a few brief words their fighting. It also handy that they happen to be fighting next to a large graveyard. Considering that this pair are fighting to the death. This might only be a brief scuffle, but again it's great to see the two go toe to toe. In what I think might be their only screen throw down together?. The crazy Korean gets to showcase some of his sweet kicks here, which is an added-bonus.

Kong Do is another great addition to the cast, playing a hired killer called Shing. Who's brought in to deal with Alan. When the crime lord's men claim they deserve to have his fee. Kong Do calmly strolls onto the lawn and shows them who's the most skilled fighter. Unfortunately the film makers cut into the Bruce Le/Kong Do duel, not sure if they even intended to show the start of it?. It's a decent enough fight that takes place atop of a hill which overlooks the city. It's not that much longer after, that we see Alan meet up with Kenneth, at an old abandoned fort, the one seen at the end of Ninja Terminator(1984). Wong Yuen-San doesn't really make for a strong lead here, then again, he's not been given that much to work with either. Despite the overall serious tone of this story, his fight with Le ends when they both simultaneously kick each other in the groin. Complete with odd quirky Kung Fu comedy noises on the soundtrack.

Special mention should go to actor Hung Fung(Fury Of A Tiger), who puts on a good performance as a corrupt police officer. Character actor Wong Yau-Ho is also worth mentioning, as the cowardly stolen jewellery dealer. There's the usual dose of Filmark sleaze throughout the movie. All the female characters, with the exception of Kenneth's girlfriend, go topless at some point. One sequence involving a couple in a tent, helps to knock this movie into the exploitation category. When reading about the production online, some people mentioned prints that run about twelve minutes shorter and omit all the nudity?.. The print I caught, was the old Hong Kong Connection Region 0 release, apparently the Delta Music release features the shorter edited print.

This movie had the cast to deliver a solid Martial Arts actioner, sadly it's just nothing more than a curiosity piece at best. The gawdy decor, fashions and 80's soundtrack, being the real star of many scenes. Bruce Le's jacket complete with large shoulder pads, takes centre stage in some scenes. For the latter half of the movie, Kwan Yung Moon becomes a rubber mask wearing, leery knife wielding maniac. Choking out most of the Hong Kong underworld whilst wearing a cheap Halloween get up. Surely there was a better way to use the man's physical talents?. When we finally get to the showdown/finale between Moon and Le, it's an average scuffle at best. When I first watched this outcome, I was shocked to see Bruce Le actually get killed on-screen. You have to give this movie some credit,

in regard's to the ending. It doesn't finish the story in the usual predictable way you would expect. There's no freeze frame after the last fight, the story continues with some non-Martial Arts sequences. With Kenneth seeking out revenge for his old friend, armed with a snub nose pistol.

**Super Power (Hong Kong, 1980: Lin Chun Wei) - aka Super Fist; Super Dragon** - More flashy forms from Indonesian kung fu star Billy Chong in this typically furious addition to his woefully short but excellent filmography.

An uninspired plot, involving Manchu fighters taking revenge against Chinese kung fu masters for earlier humiliating defeats, is brought to life by the seemingly endless stream of fast and frantic kung fu action. Despite a low budget, practically the whole film is set in cheap outdoor locations, the film makers obviously took their time in constructing the fight scenes which feature long takes of complex moves. Billy Chong is simply dazzling with his 'Natural Fist' technique mixing fluid forms with high kicks.

The last reel sees Billy in three consecutive duels which gather in intensity until the final showdown where he faces Master Mar's Horse Boxing style. It's all excellent stuff; typically fast paced, full of variety and complicated single take sequences. Another winner from Billy.

**Supergirl of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1975: Wu Min-Hsiung)** - Shanghai in the 1930's was a powderkeg of gangsters, revolutionaries, and Japanese bad guys, rife with corruption, violence, gambling, and prostitution. Judy Lee comes into town for reasons unknown and quickly finds herself sold to a brothel. Lucky for her, she's a kung fu expert and beats up anyone who lays a hand on her. From there, she manages to hook up with some Chinese revolutionaries who want to take out the Japanese oppressors who are messing up the city. There's also a baffling reunion between her and a Bruce Lee wanna-be that's a complete mystery due to the lack of subtitles. I'm guessing they're both students of the same kung fu school, whose teacher was killed by the Japs. Ultimately, after much hardship, the rebels storm the bad guy's house and kill everyone in sight.

I always enjoy watching Judy Lee fight, but the patriotic agenda and laughably inappropriate music score make the film a chore to get through. The version I saw didn't have subtitles, which made it even more challenging. Ms. Lee looks great and her fighting is quick, precise, and intense. Only when she's fighting with the other leads does it look like she's holding back. Otherwise, the stunt players are at her mercy. The production values are decent and typical of the time period, as is the formulaic plot. Recommended only for Judy Lee completists.

**Supermen Against The Orient (Hong Kong/Italy, 1974: Bitto Albertini)** - A co-production between Shaw Brothers and Italy, Supermen Against The Orient brings back the crime fighting Superman from Gianfranco Parolini's 1967 comedy The Three Fantastic Supermen. Adding Lo Lieh, Shih Szu (both appearing in other co-productions such as Blood Money and Legend Of The 7 Golden Vampires during their career) and Jackie Chan choreographed action from the Hong Kong side, Robert Malcolm stars as a US agent sent to Asia to ultimately free six agents from the grip of a drug dealer...or something. Meeting up with friends Max (Antonio Cantafora) and Jerry (Sal Borgese), they've learnt kung fu from master Tang (Lo Lieh) but are also planning to rob the consulate. Excellent location shots in Thailand and working on the Shaw Brothers lot means production values but neither action- or comedy comes off as anything but pedestrian and even boring. Robert Malcolm is verbally setup as a clumsy agent who still gets the job done but that angle isn't echoed from this point, showing a sloppiness in even the most basic of character-treatment. There's novelty value in seeing how the local flavour meet but Jackie Chan's action rarely comes to life (other than the end fight with all the supermen, showing Sal Borgese in particular impressing in the action department) and Jacques Dufhilo as the American Council hams it up to greatly annoying degree throughout. Possibly playing well for the Italian market, mostly it exists as curiosity value and the value is enough to soak in reading about this co-production, not watching it.

**Superior Darter (Taiwan, 1969: Joseph Kuo) – The Last Dart Master** - An earlier Joseph Kuo effort, with the reliable Chiang Nan as a loyal guard and Cheung Ching Ching as the woman who loves him. No darts to speak of in this movie, at least not many. The plot centers on Chiang going the extra mile to defend his benefactors and winds up getting blinded. He later meets with his sifu who tells him to train and in 3 years he will be invincible. We never really see the training, and I guess this is before Chang Cheh and Wang Yu brought in the training scene motif, so

should we have expected it? Cheung really loves Nan, but he has low self esteem big time. I mean Cheung Ching Ching digs you? Hang up the sword and make babies!

**Supreme Sword, The (Hong Kong, 1968: Ling Yun)** - Talk about old skool! Anyway, a decent little cheaply made cantonese Wu Xia with Sek Kin as one of the 4 tigers, Sam the Seed as "the Devil", a one armed villain who can travel beneath the sand and Walter Tso Tat Wah as the wandering Supreme Sword hero. Fights by LKL and Tong Gai, so, despite the lack of a lot of cool camera work, the fights are pretty good, some decent gore and a few cool weapons. From what I can tell, the sets and everything looked cramped, so I can only imagine that they could not afford a lot of different or custom made weapons (Tong Gai's specialty, right) just some hammers, axes and hook swords. Directed by Ling Yun, who made 107 movies! Not 108, though, LOL! Connie was a cutie, and pretty capable with a sword. It is interesting, in that she was a huge star at one point and "retired" before the kung fu movie craze hit. I just read that she returned to the Chinese opera stage to great success 25 years later

**Survival Of A Dragon (Taiwan, 1981: Lin Ying)** - Other than the novel idea of going from modern martial arts action to time travel film and hence a detour into Wuxia, Survival Of A Dragon (IFD re-title, possible original title being 'Hero From The Wind Tunnel') has trouble with the genre shake-up it's trying to craft. The fish out of water humour on both sides (i.e. the visitor to the Sung Dynasty and the visitor to modern times) feels rather phoned in and certainly the interaction rather stale and hollow. With conflict brewing in the competitive world of track and field and despite a tone that's meant to be light, its novel angle is all the movie have for about a fourth. The rest only lights up via a few instances of complex action choreography, with the highlight being the acrobatic nature of the cast and stuntmen. Starring Alan Lau, Lee Lieh, Li Chien-Ping and Wei Ping-Ao.

**Swift Shaolin Boxer (Taiwan, 1978: Chan Hung-Man)** - Lady, Paimeifist and ShaOW!!inDude were reviewing Angela Mao--member of the Holy Trifecta of Old Kung Fu Goddesses--movies, so I decided to get in on the fun and not be left out. I went this this movie, which is one of her more obscure films, but it is also one of her best. She's not the main character, but she does get some five fights including the finale and is the only person standing at the end, so you can say that her role is important here. The plot, such as it is, involves a small town where government agents kept on getting sent to their deaths. One fighter, Ho Kung (Barry Chan, the best thing about *One Foot Crane*) passes a rigorous government exam, that involves fighting multiple entities, including Judy Lee/Chia Ling, another member of said Trifecta. He gets the job and heads over to the town, where he's soon fighting for his life against practically everybody. His contact is an undercover agent, played by Angela Mao. Apparently there's some rebel activity going on, led by Lo Lieh, who'd be more than happy to see the agent die. And then things get crazy.

I love these kung fu/wuxia/intrigue capers made in Taiwan. They're colorful, full of quirky characters, and just fun to watch all around. See *Green Dragon Inn* and *Knife of Devil's Roaring and Souls Missing* for other good examples of the art. The kung fu on display, choreographed by Chen Shih Wei (who worked on *One-Armed Boxer* and *Marvelous Stunts of Kung Fu*) is among the best Taiwanese stuff of the period, easily matching anything Tommy Lee did at the same time, perhaps even surpassing it. Barry Chan kicks some major butt here and his handwork is fast and complex, his kicks powerful. I'm really going to have to follow this guy's work. Wong Goon-Hung, another Taiwanese mainstay, also impresses in his few fights (although his public exam sequence drags a little). Ting Wa Chung, who was the kid in *Heroes of Shaolin*, has a supporting role here, but he doesn't really get to shine here. Then there's Angela Mao. She kicks up a storm here, although her movements are more fluid and Peking Opera-like than her earlier basher movies. Her introductory fight is simply bad to the bone. There are a lot of wuxia flourishes, including a finale set in a sea of paper umbrellas developed by Q Branch, a fight set upon a bridge of saber blades, and a bamboo forest swordfight. Quick cuts and crude wires are used for some superhuman feats, but they add to the fun. In the end, I give this film a hearty recommendation.

**Sword, The (Taiwan, 1971: Jimmy Wang Yu, Pan Lei)** - Jimmy Wang Yu plays a man who cares about one thing in life, collecting swords. Being a sword fighting expert and a narrow minded asshole he has no problem taking these swords by force if he feels the need to. He wants all the famous swords and he will not let anyone stop him in his quest, not even his mother. When the movie starts there's only a couple more that he needs to complete his collection, and then he can sit around all day looking at his swords while having sex with his maids. This is a fascinating character and Wang Yu acts his ass off. I think it's his best acting performance. The fights aren't very

good, but not bad, and the violence is satisfying. I did notice a level of detail in the choreography that I didn't comprehend the first time I watched it. I haven't watched *The Sword* since it came out on DVD and I think I rated it 7/10. I'm giving it an 8.5/10 this time around. If you enjoyed movies like *King of Kings*; *The Sword* (1980) and *The Supreme Swordsman*, then you will enjoy *The Sword* (1971).

**Sword, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Patrick Tam)** - Though Patrick Tam is considered one of the leading directors of what has been termed "The New Wave" movement of the early 80's in Hong Kong, his debut film, *The Sword*, actually seems to look backwards rather than forwards. Almost as if the kung fu and ultra violent Chang Cheh sword-fighting films had not existed, *The Sword* seems to immerse itself nostalgically in the mood and style of the classical wuxia films of the 60's and early 70's

It has certain modernistic inflections – the hero has shades of gray about him, the cinematography utilizes some intriguing angles and transposition shots, a fabulous fade to red – but overall the film could easily be viewed alongside the films of King Hu. Like Hu, Tam has an incredible eye for detail, elitist artistic and cultural sensibilities and he uses the camera to paint scenes as much as film them. The film is beautifully shot – each frame looking meticulously planned out – and it generates a cool, urbane, formal and very aesthetic feel to it. It is the type of film in which one of the characters gently sips tea – excuses themselves – and goes off to commit suicide in a wordless display of honor and tact. To some degree this drains the passion out of the film – but it is so well filmed that I found it completely engrossing. It is almost as if Tam had to create this film – a homage perhaps to the classical films that he grew up with – before he could move on to the more experimental films that were to follow.

Before I make this sound like a dull walk through a beautiful art gallery, I have to mention that the action scenes – of which there are many – are incredibly entertaining. Again to a large extent they forego the extreme violence of the then contemporary films – but the sword fighting choreography is stunning and imaginative. Much of the credit for this must go to Ching Siu-Tung who choreographs the action with such verve and panache that much of it made me smile at the simple pleasure of watching it. Mixing the graceful clashing of swords with the measured use of trampolines and wires make it a visual candy store. Much of what Ching brings to this film, he utilizes later in his groundbreaking *Duel to the Death*.

Adam Cheng (who had just become a star for his turn in a TV series called *The Story of Book and Sword* and was to star in many sword films) is roaming the Chinese countryside looking for the retired Master Wah (Tien Feng) who is a legendary swordsman. He runs across a young, spirited woman who is being chased after by a nasty looking killer (Lee Hoi-sang) and he helps her out – though she is a fine swordswoman in her own right. Afterwards they decide to accompany each other in their travels – but Cheng soon crosses paths with his old girlfriend, Hsiao Yue (Chen Chi Chi), and the viewer learns that Cheng left her ten years ago to begin his obsessive odyssey like search for Master Wah.

Hsiao Yue is now married to Norman Tsui who is a nasty piece of work. His right hand man is Eddie Ko – a ninja like assassin with total dog like loyalty to his master. Tsui doesn't appreciate the fact that the old boyfriend to his wife is around and orders Ko to kill him. This is one of three terrific duels between Cheng and Ko that are suspenseful and edgy. Ching Siu Tung has Ko scuttling along the floor, moving in the shadows and hiding on the ceiling in splendid fashion as he tries to kill Cheng.

Finally, Cheng finds Master Wah, but his intentions are not what you expect – and though Cheng is basically an honorable fellow his actions begin a series of events that lead to tragedy and death for many of the characters. In the end he must face Norman Tsui and this final duel is an incredible display of cinematic and physical artistry as they fight to the last drop of blood and the final look of horror by Cheng at what he has wrought is a classic shot.

**Sword Named Revenge, A (Taiwan, 1981: Lee Ga)** - Well shot and atmospheric Wuxia that taps into the tradition of a plot containing multiple characters, twists, hidden agendas and you need to be accustomed (and certainly a bit forgiving) to this storytelling in order to give *A Sword Named Revenge* a felt pat on the back. With a main character disappearing into madness, a dreamy and sometimes bizarre nature resides in the flick, the impotent dwarf chief among the bizarre aspects. All while the usual supremacy of the martial arts world is on top of the agenda of many, many characters. Possessing a technical polish and standard but enjoyable Wuxia techniques (otherwise the action is often quite slow), *A Sword Named Revenge* is overlong material that can be endured. It's also serious dedication wasted thanks to the usual muddled storytelling.

**Sword of Justice (Taiwan, 1980: Hue Sing-Yue)** - Cheap Taiwanese Wuxia flick, that also feels a lot like a samurai movie. A man (Lung San Long, The Star Sword) hunts down the members of a notorious group of assassins (The Hai Teng Killers) one by one. The plot sounds simple, and really it is. But the way it plays out is well done and has a twist or two. (I felt one was predictable, and one was pretty surprising)

The movie kicks off with a fantastic fight scene in the dark rain, setting the tone for the rest of the movie perfectly. From here on out it moves at a breakneck pace. The main character is your typical righteous lone-swordsman character, except he's a little more of a smart ass than most. (Which makes him more bad ass to me). Most of the assassins are all awesome, ironically the one I remember most (outside of the main baddie) was pretty minor in the grand scheme. The man with a fan in the gazebo. He actually was pretty damn frightening and crazy, and there was a great chilling distance shot of him and his target in the Gazebo. The main villain completely loses it at the end and it is awesome.

It feels like a cross between an HK Wuxia flick and a Japanese "Chambara" samurai movie. This description fits both the setting, characters, and fighting of the movie. Especially the fighting, some scenes have multiple moves per cut and some flashy swordplay (like a wuxia flick); While others feature more anticipation and tension followed by a swift kill (like a chambara flick!). Many great (and again, chilling) death scenes as well. People go down in a realistic, fast manner (mostly). Two that stand out are one guy falls into a well, and the camera stays on the well as the rope descends. Another man quickly crashes down into a fence. On paper these things sound minor, especially given that it's an extremely low budget Taiwanese movie. But they really are executed great, making them memorable scenes, and add to that fantastic overall feel of the movie. The choreography is good but nothing special. The best fights again, are mainly made by the dark vibe rather than the action itself. The final fight is pretty flashy and even has some acrobatics thrown in.

The atmosphere and vibe of this movie is what I like most about it. It is very lonely, dark and gritty, and there isn't a single light hearted moment. There are no extras, anyone seen plays a part in either the story or the fighting, adding to the great atmosphere. The low budget worked in its favor in this aspect I'm sure. Bland sets, locations, a fitting soundtrack, and the use of fog and rain create a constant eerie feeling. Top that off with some downright psychotic characters! The dub is fantastic, and has some of the best one-liners ever. "I don't like friends that are living, only enemies that are dead!"

The PQ was terrible on the release I saw. Strangely, again, due to how damn gritty and dark the movie is, the gritty and dark PQ made it even better to me! Anyway, I love this movie. I try to include some negatives, but there really aren't any here for me. Yeah the usual genre stuff (less than stellar story, and acting) but A. I can easily overlook that in favor of its strengths, and B. Even those things are pretty solid for a cheap independent film from a bunch of people I've never heard of.

Any fan of dark wuxia flicks needs to see this.

**Sword Stained With Royal Blood, The (Hong Kong, 1981: Chang Cheh)** - Kuo Chui takes centre stage for one of the later Venom's films that seems less like a team affair and more of a showcase for his individual talents. Chiang Sheng and Lu Feng are there (and are undoubtedly vital in crafting the fight scenes) but very much in supporting roles.

Apparently based on a novel by famous novelist Jing Yong, this tells the story of the son, Yuan Cheng Zhi (Kuo Chui), of a murdered general who discovers a treasure map and a martial arts manual. After learning the secrets of the manual and taking the sword that he found with it, previously owned by a Mr Chin She, Yuan follows the treasure map which leads him to the home of the Wan family. Unfortunately he manages to create a bit of a trap for himself as the Wan's were sworn enemies of Chin She and, after challenging Yuan to a friendly duel, recognise his fighting style and take him for a descendent of their nemesis. Worse than that, Yuan is actually carrying the sword of Chin She, a dead give away. Much fighting then follows.

I've glossed over many of the intricacies of the plot which is surprisingly complex for a Chang Cheh Venom's film (I can't think of many that include flashbacks) but the story is never allowed to slow down the pace of the film (however I think I was watching a heavily edited version with a running time of approx 80 minutes) which is punctuated by regular action. And the action is quite stunning.

As previously mentioned the film is the perfect showcase for Kuo Chui's talents which are really pushed to the fore in the fantastic final showdown. It's here that he faces a room full of (well, 8 actually) adversaries, including Chiang Sheng and Lu Feng in a battle which must rank as one of the Venom's best film climaxes. The sequence, lasting

about 15 minutes, is packed full of weaponry and acrobatics, all combined with the Venom's perfect timing. And of course it would be nothing without the great camerawork and editing normally associated with Chang Cheh's work.

**Swordsman Of All Swordsmen, The (Taiwan, 1968: Joseph Kuo)** - While not 100% certain on this, The Swordsman Of All Swordsmen is at least Joseph Kuo's big breakthrough in the Wuxia genre 10 years into his directorial career. As with subsequent efforts the next year such as King Of Kings, via this film Kuo joins the ranks of King Hu and Chang Cheh as thoughtful, stylish storytellers in combination with conveyers of exciting, creative action. Swordsman Tsai Ying-Chieh (Tin Yau) is on a killing spree in the name of revenge. Having witnessed his family being killed, no one and nothing will stand in his way. Meeting the mysterious Black Dragon, who wants a piece of the notorious swordsman, and swordswoman Swallow (Polly Kuan), it's the latter that tries to talk Tsai out of pursuing violent revenge. Even after being nursed to health by Swallow, Tsai is hellbent on getting the last one on his list...

Without breaking new ground, Joseph Kuo translates Tyrone Hsu's intelligent script well. It's straightforward revenge stuff that is intercepted by common but human questions about the notion of revenge. Is there something valid in bloodthirst and can you re-evaluate along the way in order to possibly achieve growth as a swordsman in a very violent world? With marvellous cinematography and a violent edge to the action, Kuo and crew essentially creates sword-brawls that brings the intensity up a considerable notch. The experimenting with undercranking isn't always successful though but The Swordsman Of All Swordsmen is still a classic piece of Wuxia CINEMA that manages to pack valid depth (minus points for a tad too much melodramatic acting though) in a short package.

**Swordsmates, The (Hong Kong, 1969: Cheung Ying, Poon Fan)** - Third watching for this movie. Chin Ping plays the daughter of the chief of an escort company who has to deliver a precious Jade Statue of Guan Ying goddess, in which a secret document vital for the security of the nation is hidden, to the capital. After her father has been ambushed and wounded, she is helped by her cousin, and later by her father and a few friends of his in order to get back the document. Very good fights. Wang Hsieh, Chin Ping, Tsung Hua and the guy playing Iron Claws are excellent, and I spotted Sammo Hung among the Barbarians fighters at the end of the movie!

**Sworn Chivalries (Taiwan, 1969: Chang Mei-Chun)** - The prime Minister is plotting against the King. In order to protect his daughter, this one asks some men to escort her to the capital, but they are all killed by a group of men hired by the prime minister. When he learns that General Ga, who is faithful to the king, plans to send his own son to escort the princess, he decides to kill him, but what he ignores is that his men killed the best friend of General Ga's son who had decided to impersonate his friend Ga Tsu Da in order to save his life.

Later, Ga Tsu Da escorts the princess to the capital ; they also carry a secret treasure map which is very important for the sake of the country. During the journey, they are attacked by some men and when he discovers that Ga Tsu Da is still alive, the prime minister decides to send his adopted son (Tien Yeh) to help his men to kidnap the princess. Ga Tsu Da is hurt and later, he and the princess meet a woodcutter who lives with his mother and is an ancient chivalry of the king. When Ga Tsu Da asks him to help them to go to the capital for the sake of the country, he refuses because he doesn't want to leave his aged mother alone. When she hears that, the mother kills herself and asks his son to help Ga Tsu Da and the princess in a letter and the three of them leave the house after burning it.

At the same moment, Ga Tsu Da's parents are killed by their chief intendant who is a spy for the prime minister (Suen Yuet ; I wonder if this actor played at least once the role of a good guy ! In each movie I saw him, he was a traitor, an hypocrit, and a very bad guy !). He runs with Tien Yeh to chase Ga Tsu Da and his two companions and while Tien Yeh is hidden, Suen Yuet tells Ga Tsu Da that his parents were killed by another of his friends (Tung Lam) and when this one (who was spying the killers tactics in a secret place) joins Ga Tsu Da, this one wants to kill him to get revenge for his parents. While they are fighting, Suen Yuet kidnaps the princess and he tries to rape her, but Tien Yeh doesn't want to let him do it.

Later, the Prime minister proposes an exchange to Ga Tsu Da : the princess against the treasure map. Ga Tsu Da, Tung Lam, the woodcutter and the ancient master of Tien Yeh accept the deal and they discuss of a plan to avoid the tactics of the killers. As Suen Yuet tries to rape the princess once again, he is killed by Tien Yeh, who leads her to do the exchange with the treasure map. Then, there's a big fight and the ancient master of Tien Yeh asks him to repent and to disobey prime minister's orders but the old man is killed by the killers and the princess and her three protectors fly away.

When he returns to prime minister's house, Tien Yeh tells him to change his plans and not to try to kill the king and become king himself, but he is killed. Finally, the princess gives up her love for Ga Tsu Da in order to obey to his father who has promise to marry her to the Ching prince in order to save the peace between the two countries. Superb movie.

**Tai Chi Chun (People's Republic of China, 1985: Chik Ngai-Hung) - aka Secret of Tai Chi; Revenge of the Tai-Chi Master** - This mainland-Chinese produced epic was made around the time of Jet Li "Shaolin Temple" craze. It is similar in that it strives for some style authenticity, features topnotch mainland Chinese wu shu players, and is shot in beautiful locations. The featured style is Chen style tai chi. Behind the opening credits, you get the Chen form performed by Chen Xiao Wang (the current grandmaster). This sequence itself is worth the entire film (unfortunately this is just a cameo). The story is quite action-packed (a typical Ching dynasty revenge arc). There is actually more Shaolin wu shu by this cast, including a training sequence at Shaolin temple. When they finally get down to the Chen tai chi training (midway), you should not be disappointed. There is a push hands sequence that is extremely educational (the moves are frozen and called out by name). Watch the Chen work of the old man who plays the "uncle", and the two girls who play his daughters (they do Chen style but are clearly wu shu-trained). The finale is a bit sloppy, which prevents it from getting a full 5 rating.

**Taoism Drunkard (Hong Kong, 1983: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - I'm still trying to figure this one out. Believe me, I would know, but what were the Yuens smoking in the 80's??? PCP was big back then and crack just started in the ghettos of America but no, this movie feels more like a mash of LSD, banana peels, and the diggity-dank when you start taking this one in. Honestly, right after it started, I thought out loud "Did someone slip something in my chicken? Are these the flashbacks everyone said would happen?". This movie should be retitled: *Taoism Drunkard*- WTF.

Hard to get info for this one but I see Yuen Yat Chor in here for sure and the rest of the Yuens are scattered everywhere in this movie. I honestly don't know where to begin because after a brightly-caped and slightly underdressed, portly villain named Old Devil busts in the wall, followed by *giallo*-style torture scene, then a Cheese-Mobile driven by a slightly pedophilic, buck-toothed drunken priest, and finishing with a grandma who is *obviously* a grandpa and you begin to get the picture on why I had such a hard time with this movie review. Oddly enough, the action is top notch, if some obvious wire-work doesn't bother you (and it shouldn't, if you like the Yuens family work). I haven't even mentioned the nightmare inducing Watermelon Monster, whose cannonball shape and sharp penis-slashing teeth just gave me the chills after remembering. If you're not creeped out by that thing, well, you haven't seen the movie yet!

There's a whole lot going on in this film that I haven't mentioned either, because coherency of plot is not what you should be watching this for. Yat Chor is the "Cherry Boy" who is needed for some festival but honestly, half the time it sounds like an excuse for the priest to get in this kid's pants. Other antagonists abound, such as Fat Lady, The RenFair Asshat, and the CrazysleevesLady. You might think those descriptions are a little exaggerated or puerile but watch the movie and you'll find they are oh-so accurate. The best fighting in the movie comes from Old Devil and Yuen Yat Chor but kung fu action almost takes a backseat to the insanity flowing past you on the screen. This movie is like tripping, only without having to take anything at all. And it's a wild trip too, you might need someone around to let you know everything will be ok. No rating but *highest recommendation* to see.

**Taste of Cold Steel, A (Hong Kong, 1970: Griffin Yueh) – The Purple Sword** - The villainous Lord Wu Yi and his devious son, Lu Tian plot to steal the famous jewel of the Gan family, the Violet Light Sword. When Lu's initial plan fails, he ends up in the grip of four crude bandits. He dupes them into becoming his accomplices and the group raze the Gan homestead stealing the sword and injuring one of the three sisters and killing everyone else. Hsu Chu and third Gan sister survive and upon returning to their destroyed fort, realize that the eldest sister has vanished. Meanwhile, Yanan, the second Gan sister has went to get their uncle for help. In trying to steal the sword from the bandits, Lu incurs their wrath and is held for ransom. The Gan's then make several rescue attempts to free their kidnapped sibling and retrieve the coveted sword.

Director Yueh Feng creates an atmosphere of dread very similar to his grim and brutal *Bells of Death* (1968). It's not quite as uncompromisingly vicious due to some dramatic flourishes and a less personable tone than *Bells* but Feng is very successful in making his villains as barbaric as possible during the films brief 78 minute running time. The film is a bit similar to *Swordswomen Three* (1970) which saw release the month prior. There's three women sworn to protect the family heirloom-in *Swordswomen* it's the Mighty Steel Blade which acts as a magnet when unsheathed and in *Cold Steel*, it's the Violet Light Sword. Also, Chang Yi is in both as is Essie Lin Chia. The one disappointing



element is that unlike the Mighty Steel Blade, the Violet Light Sword is unimpressive and has no unusual properties aside from glowing when it's pulled from its scabbard.

The characters are interesting for the most part. There isn't much time given to fleshing them out but they're put through enough harrowing ordeals to keep you somewhat interested in their plight and the bad guys are so ferocious that it adds to the suspense and makes up for what little characterization is allowed. Essie Lin Chia is the most memorable and in one great scene she attacks Lord Wu Yi's stronghold alone only to find out that his son has been taken captive. Yanan (Essie) threatens to kill Lord Wu lest his men make way but then he states he'll give her 5,000 taels of silver if she'll rescue his son and let him go. She then decides to avenge her father instead and summarily kills him right there!

Chang Yi is, for the most part wasted and isn't given much to do and not that he delivers much conviction. I've never seen what his appeal was really although I did like him a lot in *Bells of Death*. He does have some solid action here and in one scene he is pitted against Lu Tian in a duel that takes place inside a circle encased in flame. The real stars of the show are the villains.

The Five Tigers are a nasty bunch of killers who demonstrate just how cruel they can be in one scene in which they herd all the workers of an Inn into a room and systematically slaughter them all. They take their time doing it. You don't see the carnage save for the dying silhouettes of the victims and the splattered blood as it hits the doors and their screams as the bandits slash and stab them repeatedly. Three of the five are given the bulk of the gangs screen time. Ku Feng gets to warm up for his captivatingly merciless role as the heavy in *The Black Tavern* (1972) in which he also used a whip. Wu Ma plays the Sick Dragon as a hunchback as is very convincing. The leader is played by Huang Chun Hsin who also played a great villain in *Pursuit* (1972). Here, he chews up the screen killing and torturing people left and right as the leader of the Five Tigers. Sammo Hung has a role as one of the bandits.

Chen Hung Lieh is also his usual villainous self although at the beginning you are led to believe that he is the main bad guy but this is not the case. He uses cunning and guile to lay his hands on the sword but he is constantly undermined first by the heroes then by the Five Tigers. Wang Hsia is on hand fleetingly as a good guy this time playing the uncle to the Gan women who leads his men to rescue the remaining family members from the bandit gang. By the time he and his group show up during the final moments, justice has already been meted out save for one final bit of retribution. The fate of Lu Tian is the only aspect of the film I thought was lacking and even though it's a minor quibble, it's not enough to hinder the enjoyment of this fine but very violent Wu Xia swordplay film. And like so many countless Shaw productions, this film excels in the brutality department.

Although I find much of Yueh Feng's movies pedantic and often times dull, this is not the case here as this is the most action packed film I've seen from the man. Only a marginally lesser film than BELLS OF DEATH (1968), if you are a fan of that film, than you will most definitely enjoy this one. Also recommended for those who like their Shaw Brothers movies excessively violent.

**Tattoo Connection, The (Hong Kong, 1978 – Lee Tso-Nam) - AKA: Black Belt Jones 2; Black Belt Jones 2: The Tattoo Connection; Conexão Hong Kong** - We open with mob enforcer Dong Ho (Dorian Tan Tao-Liang, aka "The Flashlegs") entering a rival's territory, demanding that they hand over his boss's ex-account, a huge fellow named Fat Dog (Cheung Fu-Hung). Apparently Fat Dog had embezzled some money from Mr. Lu (Cheng Sing of *Shaolin Plot*) before leaving his employment. The rival gang is unwilling to give Fat Dog up, but after a blistering display of Dong's kicking prowess, they change their minds. We're then treated to a James Bondian credits sequence with some 70s band singing a disco track about diamonds being a girl's best friend. When we meet up with Dong and Fat Dog again, the former is pleading with his boss to spare the latter's life and break his arm instead. Mr. Lu relents.

We then cut to a scruffy-looking Caucasian male getting off a plane in Hong Kong. He gets into a funny-looking limo of sorts and is being taken to a secret place. Said man, George (Norman Wingrove), is a bit nervous to get to his destination as quick as possible, probably due to the contents of the suitcase handcuffed to him. Suddenly, truck pulls up in front of his car and a bunch of Lu's men pour out and start beating George and his colleagues with axes and hammers. They ultimately take the suitcase and get away.

Enter stock footage of San Francisco. There we learn that the suitcase contained a very expensive diamond. The Board of Directors of the company that insured the diamond mention that the stone is worth a good three million dollars, and that if it isn't retrieved in a week, they'll have to pay for it, which might make their company go broke. One of the directors brings in an ex-CIA agent named Lucas (Jim Kelly, who'll spend most of the film being called "Black Man" or "That Black Guy"), who has lots of work experience in the Far East. "I'm like the black Six-Million-

Dollar Man," says Lucas when he meets the Board.

Lucas hooks up with George after arriving in Hong Kong. The club they go to on Lucas' first night is the place of employment of a hostess named Louisa (Cheng Suk-Ying, *Dreams of Eroticism* and *Innocent Lust*), who happens to be the girlfriend of a man who helped steal cars for the heist. Louisa, who wants the 100-grand reward for information leading to the diamond's retrieval, tells Lucas to talk to her boyfriend. Lucas goes to visit the boyfriend, who takes him out to the lumberyard where he had stashed the cars following the heist. A short fight and car chase ensue, with Lucas making it out alive and the boyfriend...well...not.

After the thug's body is pulled from the harbor, Lucas notices a peculiar eagle tattoo on the dead man's bicep. After checking out all tattoo parlours in town, Lucas finds himself at a Japanese-run tattoo parlour that looks like it caters to the local branch of the Yakuza (should they exist in any form in Hong Kong), not to mention naked women with tattoos on their breasts. The owner of the joint reluctantly points Lucas in the direction of the nightclub that Mr. Lu frequents. Lucas goes and falls for one of the strippers, Nana (Lee Hoi-Gei, *Bruce and the Iron Finger*), who just happens to be Dong Ho's girlfriend (sort of). Nana turns down Lucas's advances on the grounds that a) she doesn't know him and b) he's black. Mr. Lu's men then corner him in an alley outside the club and proceed to get their arses kicked, except for Dong Ho, who's every bit Lucas's equal in the fighting department.

The next day Lucas receives a phone call from Fat Dog, who wants to give Lucas some information in exchange for fifty grand, half of the value of the reward money established by the insurance company. Their first meeting yields no results since Lucas doesn't have the money on him, but they schedule a second meeting the next day. Fat Dog doesn't make it, since a pair of Lu's enforcers (Kong Do and Bolo Yeung) kill him right after his initial encounter with Lucas. Lucas figures out that George is in on the heist and is leaking information about Lucas's encounters to Lu at every turn. Before Lucas can pump George for information, Lu has him killed, too.

By this time, Mr. Lu just wants to be rid of Lucas, so he has Nana try to poison him. Lucas is smart enough to see through Nana's sudden flirting and reverses the situation. It doesn't take long for Lucas to find out where Lu is hiding. And then there's Dong Ho, who's not very happy about what Lu is doing to his woman...

*The Tattoo Connection* is easily the sleaziest film I've seen in a very long time. A Cold Fusion-style total list would yield a breast count of 14, which is almost to say that nearly every woman that shows up in the movie will doff her duds at some point. There isn't much titillation in these scenes, since all but one of the characters getting naked are being exploited in some way or another, such as the scene where an old jeweler is examining a prostitute's assets with his eye loupe. The movie is exceptionally misogynistic in how it treats Lee Hoi-Gei. There's a sequence midway through where she's essentially raped by Chen Sing, following another uncomfortable scene in which Tan Tao-Liang's antihero character slaps her around for being a whore, as if getting raped was her fault. Later on, she tries to kill Jim Kelly by slipping him a super Viagra drug and screwing him to death, only to take the drug herself and start stripping for him (with "funky" music playing in the background, of course). And just to make things even worse, she exits the movie via a rather brutal beating given to her by Chen Sing at the start of the climax.

The movie needed to focus on the action rather than the female exploitation. After an excellent display of Tan Tao-Liang's kicking skills, the action more or less slows down until the last 15 minutes, when Lucas storms Mr. Lu's private ship. There are a few small kerfuffles here and there, but they're never enough to make the film feel less slow than it really is. Former Bruce Lee imitator Bruce Liang handles the choreography, although he tends to make it a little too mannered and structured for a film set in the modern day. That sort of fighting is fine for period pieces, but it's jarring in more modern settings. Tan Tao-Liang actually gets one of his better showcases in his fights and easily the film's highlight.

Jim Kelly apparently choreographed his own fights, which are a lot simpler and Bruce Lee-esque in execution. His kempo skills are actually a nice complement to Tan's kicking, since kempo features some complex handwork that looks good on screen (just watch Jeff Speakman's *The Perfect Weapon*). His bell-bottoms interfere with some of his kicks, and he doesn't cut loose until the end, but Kelly's fights are more than adequate. Thankfully, we get two fights between him and Dorian Tan, with both skirmishes showing the fighters to be evenly matched. I have to point out that Jim Kelly is almost two heads taller than main villain Chen Sing, so it almost looks like he's kicking around a dwarf (albeit a dwarf who has a mean Tiger Claw technique) at the climax.

Apparently the film fared well enough that a follow-up was considered. Unfortunately, according to some sources, Jim Kelly didn't get along very well with the crew, especially Bruce Liang and Dorian Tan. Kelly apparently had a case of Steven Seagalitis and insisted that his character be more or less invincible in the film's fights. He also didn't like to be hit by the actors, but didn't mind hitting them himself while filming. 'Tis a shame, since Kelly once wrote on MySpace that this film gave him the best showcase for his physical talents. Had they made another film with the same level of choreography, but with more action and less misogyny, it might've surpassed *Black Belt Jones* and *Enter the Dragon* as his best work.

**Tattooed Dragon, The (Hong Kong, 1973: Lo Wei)** - By 1973 both director Lo Wei and superstar Jimmy Wang Yu had moved away from the paternal embrace of the Shaw Brothers for other opportunities. By doing so they had also left behind the glossy Shaw look and their comparatively high budgets. This is fairly obvious in this very generic Golden Harvest kung fu production with little if any money spent on sets or costumes. It feels like light years from some of Wang Yu's classic Shaw films such as *The One-Armed Swordsman*. Lo Wei by this time had been slotted into being a kung fu director – perhaps an awkward shift for him as his strength in the Shaw films had been fun sleek caper/spy films and costumed wuxia movies often starring Cheng Pei-pei. But his success with Bruce Lee and the sudden explosive popularity of kung fu films forced a number of directors to quickly take on this mantle. The low budget aspects of these films – putting actors into contemporary outdoor settings and letting them bash one another – also fit neatly into the cash strapped strategy of Golden Harvest in its start-up years.

For all the criticism Lo Wei has received over the years, the one thing that can't be denied is that though his talents may be questioned he certainly seemed to recognize talent in others. Here he brings on two young actors who both went on to very successful careers. According to on-line filmographies this was the debut for Sylvia Chang who Lo Wei also used the next year in *Slaughter in San Francisco*. This Taiwanese actress soon broke loose of Lo Wei and began to shuttle back and forth between Hong Kong and Taiwanese productions. Sam Hui was still in the early stages of figuring out how to proceed with his career as Golden Harvest initially seemed intent on making him into a genial action comedy star with a bit of a bumpkin personality (here, *Chinatown Capers*, *Back Alley Princess*). Within a few short years of course he found his true comedic footing in the classic films with his two brothers, Michael and Ricky. In the early 1980's both Sam and Sylvia found themselves working together again as two thirds of the equation in the *Aces Go Places* series.

This film begins with promise - a Leone like credit sequence overlaid with a Shaft type score and two quick fight sequences – before it slumps into a lengthy exposition that won't make anyone's pulse beat faster. Though not identified, the first fight sequence appears to take place among the splendid ruins of Ayutthaya, the ancient capital of Thailand. Here the *Tattooed Dragon* (Wang Yu) sets upon a gang of thieves who stole money from the Chinese Overseas Charity. The *Tattooed Dragon* named for a large tattoo on his back seems to be a kung fu Samaritan who goes around helping the downtrodden for no compensation – perhaps a trust baby. In the ensuing fight he is injured and makes his escape to a martial arts dojo. Here he is tracked down and again is injured and again runs away leaving the dojo members to fend for themselves – not exactly the stuff kung fu heroes are suppose to be made of.

This time he is taken in by Yang (Hui) a poor farmer who raises ducks and has a master plan to raise enough ducks to buy pigs and then raise enough pigs to buy cattle and then raise enough cattle to take over the world and marry his sweetheart Hsiang (Sylvia). She worries that by the time this plan works she will be an old maid. They tend to the *Tattooed Dragon* along with their friend Kun (Lee Kwan). When not tending to his ducks, Yang practices kickboxing. Coincidentally, the boss (James Tien) discovers that underneath the village where Yang lives are deposits of minerals and he develops an ingenious plan to take over the land. Knowing that Chinese men are all gambling addicts and will gamble until they lose everything, he installs a casino in town and sure enough all the men are lining up to play and forgetting their wives, children and work. Soon they are losing their land as well.

The *Tattooed Dragon* steps into this with both his gambling (he can tell what dice have been rolled through his acute hearing) and fighting skills and the final fight between him and the gang is actually fairly decent – though you can easily see that the stunt men slow down occasionally to allow Wang Yu the time to get into position for the next move. Tien gets extra credit for allowing himself to be set on fire and continuing to fight. Tien would go on to a solid career as the villain in many films to come. In the tradition of all townsfolk in movies, they stand around and allow the hero to do all the killing.

**Temptation (Taiwan, 1968: Lee Chi-Sin)** - The story is about Wong Yung and another disciple of an old master who are told by this one to go to Xi Zhou in order to help a general to get rid of bandits. During their journey, they save a young lady from the bandits and, as their master has ordered them to help the poor and the oppressed, they offer her to take her to her uncle's house. When they arrive, everybody has been killed and the house has been burnt.

Then, they tell the lady that they'll take her to her birth town, Xi Zhou. The younger disciple falls for the lady, but, as their master has told them to avoid women, he tries to respect his words. When they are almost arrived, the lady tries to bribe Wong Yung in order that he takes her as his wife and leaves the younger disciple, but he doesn't want to.

Then, she plays the same comedy to the younger disciple and she succeeds in it. When he discovers that his friend and the lady have escaped, Wong Yung chases them and asks his friend to return to Xi Zhou with him, but he refuses. While he is trying to kill the lady in order that his friend obeys, Wong Yung hurts the younger disciple by accident. Then, the old master arrives and Wong Yung takes the younger disciple and follows the master, leaving the lady with only her eyes to cry. This is a good movie, with good fights, which shows us how the martial arts fighters respect their rules even when the "human world" offers temptations to them. Worth watching.

**Ten Brothers Of Shaolin (Taiwan, 1979: Ting Ching)** - Straightforward and simple martial arts genre entertainment that is probably still way too busy on characters for its own good, it's still about crowd pleasing and Ten Brothers Of Shaolin delivers. The Shaolin temple brothers of the title are sent out in the world, one is a wanted criminal and thus begins incoherency and entertaining action scenes with popular genre stars. It's this shallow way of looking at a rather well shot product (director Ting Ching uses the widescreen frame very well) that in the end seems suitable. The likes of excellent female lead Chia Ling, Don Wong and Phillip Ko walk about, square off against Leung Kar-Yan, Stephen Tung and white haired villain Chang Yi and the basic ride is what should be extracted out of Ten Brothers Of Shaolin. It IS a good remark.

**10 Magnificent Killers (Hong Kong, 1977: Fong Yau)** - The plot revolves around a Constable named Le Yu Wai (whose son Chan San is also his student) who tries to bring 2 killers to justice 1, the top man (Ling Chu- Yang Sze) is pitted against his former colleague (Tu Shu, who also has a student Shao Lee who is in fact the long lost son of Le Yu Wai).

There are so many fights in this film (more than a dozen!) the fighting is good but I wouldn't say it was top grade stuff, the choreography is a little loose at times but generally the fights (some a little too cranked) are well put together and certainly worth watching. Yang Sze- AGAIN! It's not just how he handles choreography and economic not looking fighting style that is top rate. In this film he conveys (without trying) a demeanor that is both calm and menacing at the same time, I mean he is a killer yet he carries a cage with a pet bird that he cares very much for and even talks to, the contrast couldn't be more stark!

Early one of Le Yu Wei's sidekicks is stabbed, he dies but Le Yu Wei also is stabbed by Shao Lee and also needs an antidote- he doesn't get it yet still lives! The first few killers die a little too easily! Ling Chu is underused and dies far too easily in the end fight (presumably of the same type of poison that killed one of the constables but not Lee Yu wei?)

All is revealed at the end however there is no real set up to the finale. When Ling Chu reveals the truth about Shao Lee's master Shao Lee just takes this as the truth, there is no questioning of his teacher, no struggle to resolve whether he should (or can) kill the man who has raised him for the past 20 years- he just throws a knife and kills him!!! Compare this to legend of a fighter where the conflicts are a powerful part of the film

Chan San and then (his father) constable Lee Yu Wai turn up out of the blue. While Chan San and Shao Lee (who are in fact brothers) are facing up and Shao Lee says Dad your alive!!! Where was the set up to all this?? As a fan of Kung Fu movies I don't expect (or care for) intricate clever plots and story telling however even a basic story can (and should) be told clearly by a taut narrative. The lack of plot spoils this film and it also appears the director (Fong Yeh who plays Lee Yu Wei) was half attempting a comedy as there are 1 or 2 goofy moments in the film that don't match the undercurrent of vengeance that should have been simmering to the film's apex. Fortunately they don't overshadow the film.

Early in the film it would have been an idea to show a flash back with Shao Lee being 'rescued' by Tu Shu. This would have made Ling Chu's later revelations more meaningful. Perhaps the director had too much to do and overlooked a lot of this but then again that's what the continuity department are there for!

This is a case of what if...With better direction this could have been a powerful film instead it's a fight fest with a half baked attempt at comedy, clumsily narrated with the conclusion at the end. Would I recommend the film? Well to die hards yes, but not for newbies.

**Ten Tigers of Kwantung (Hong Kong, 1979: Chang Cheh)** - Not exactly well liked (the announcement that it was coming to DVD was mostly greeted with groans), and suffering from a troubled history (this is what happens when you let MPs visit the shoot!), I'll be annoying, buck the trend and I quite like this all-star mish mash from Shaw Brothers.

Jumping back and forth a generation, the film introduces us to the formation of the Ten Tigers of Kwantung (initially two rival factions of kung fu masters played off against each other by the Manchus), and years later, shows the Manchu's taking a murderous revenge against the descendants of the Ten Tigers.

The flashback structure is not as confusing as I was fearing, though it may have been simpler to show all the "older footage" first, then go forward to the later scenes, rather than jump back and forth. From what I can gather, the reason for this odd approach was due to the original film being abandoned following one of Fu Sheng's recurrent on-set accidents, but I'm not sure.

The swamped cast results in many of the stars being crudely sidelined, not least of all poor Dick Wei, who never seems to do ANYTHING in any of his Shaw films. Ti Lung, Fu Sheng and Ku Feng get the lions share of the "past" footage, but do not play very engaging characters. Stealing scenes right left and centre are Lu Feng as a gruff but also jovial fisherman, and a completely stark raving mad performance by Phillip Kwok as the Druken Master, Beggar So Hat-yi. As usual, Wei Pei and Sun Chien are shoved to the sidelines in favour of the 'Opera' Venoms.

The latter footage gives Wang Li a chance to be a really sly villain, but none of the Baby Venoms come across pretty well, and they are not helped by some atrocious hairstyles - one of them has latter day Elvis style mutton chops.

Besides the usual fake sets (I've seen more convincing piers in a pond), and the usual rubbish score by Eddie H. Wang (as in; take a load of De Wolfe cues and slap them together with no sense of style or consistency), there is some especially cracking fight choreography on display here, including some blistering and varied weapons fights - plus a little bit of gore! When it comes to Peking Opera meets Grand Guignol, Chang Cheh is still the master!

Fun but not especially good, this film is ideal entertainment if somewhat lacking.

**Ten Tigers of Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1978: Ngai Hoi-Fung)** - TEN TIGERS OF SHAOLIN (1979) has enough well-staged fight scenes to please hardcore kung fu fans, although the lack of a strong story may turn off some viewers. The lead actor is Bruce Leung (aka Bruce Liang/ Hsiao Liang), whose brother, Leung Siu Hung, happens to be the film's fight choreographer. Bruce Leung has achieved some renewed fame in 2005, thanks to his performance in Stephen Chow's KUNG FU HUSTLE as "the Beast," the mad kung fu master busted out of an insane asylum by the Axe Gang to vanquish the defenders of Pig Sty Alley.

The simple storyline of TEN TIGERS charts what happens after the title group of kung fu fighters disrupts the criminal operations of Lord Yung, a local corrupt official. In retaliation, Lord Yung's men kidnap the wife of a student of the Tigers, leading to a series of escalating confrontations culminating in a huge brawl in an open field between the Ten Tigers and all of the villains' men.

One interesting scene involves the one female member of the Tigers (Mi Hsueh, aka Michelle Lai) disguising herself as a visiting princess with other Tigers dressed as her guards, while the rest of the group pose as beggars clamoring for money. The plan is to get Lord Yung to invite the "princess" and her party into his house so they can then look for the student's kidnapped wife. This is all a great buildup to what should have been a series of very clever scenes, but instead the film abruptly drops this narrative thread in order to speed things up to the climactic battle.

And what a battle it is. It takes up the last 25 minutes of an 85-minute film and features at least two dozen martial arts performers fighting in a variety of kung fu styles and with different weapons. In short, the goods are delivered.

Jason Pai Piao (HELL'S WINDSTAFF, SHAOLIN RESCUERS) is the only real name in the cast, although there are other familiar faces throughout. I was unfamiliar with Bruce Leung before seeing KUNG FU HUSTLE, although I'd seen some of his films before, and sought out this film precisely to see him in a starring role. He's quite an effective performer and fighter and I'd like to seek out more of his starring roles. Ground Zero's DVD edition offers a better print and transfer than we'd normally expect from that company.

**That Fiery Girl (Hong Kong, 1968: Yan Jun)** - This title may sound more like a spin off from the 1960's TV sitcom "That Girl" with the ever so bubbly Marlo Thomas ("That Fiery Girl, when she fights she is all a whirl – oh, our Fiery Girl") – than a martial arts film of deadly mayhem and blood. Instead though this stars the very non-bubbly Cheng Pei-pei who would as soon cut someone in half than throw them a perky smile. Cheng Pei-pei was rarely one for pleasant amenities in her films – almost always very serious and with a deadly agenda on her mind. In some ways she is like Michelle Yeoh, always looking much more comfortable with a sword in her arms than a man and her romances rarely had much sizzle to them – but no one was better at projecting sheer determination in getting what was hers – whether it was justice or revenge.

Looking back at Cheng Pei-pei's career one can't help but note that after "Come Drink With Me" turned her into an unexpected martial arts star, none of her many similar type of films that followed ever even came close to being as good. She had been trained as a dancer and her role in "Hong Kong Nocturne" seemed to be the first step that would lead her into a career of musicals and romances, but King Hu changed all that by picking her to be his heroine in the seminal work that moved martial arts film onto a higher plain. Sadly though, Hu soon left the services of the Shaw Brothers for Taiwan and he never was able to work with Cheng Pei-pei again though he had very much wanted her for "Dragon Inn". Instead she often had to work with competent but far from inspired directors such as Lo Wei (on five films), Chui Chang-wang and Yen Chun. The one film in which she starred for Chang Cheh was "Golden Swallow" in which he took her character from "Come Drink with Me" and made her secondary to that of Jimmy Wang-yu (always a major sore point with me!). "That Fiery Girl" from director Yen Chun is fairly laborious for most of its running time until the final twenty minutes in which he finally turns Cheng Pei-pei loose and allows her to do what she does best – massive bloodletting.

Her nickname is "Red Chili" and she is the daughter of a bandit king (Tang Ti) who has a small army of men working for him and is well protected from the law by a series of deadly booby traps that surrounds his land. He is after a treasure map and sends his two top men (Fan Mei Sheng and Cheng Lei) along with Cheng Pei-pei to find it among the Mei clan. They have no success but still take great pleasure in cutting off a man's arm and setting his house on fire and then laughing uproariously at how amusing it all is. Cheng Pei-pei is a little more sensitive and is mildly miffed that they acted so cruelly and laughed so loudly. A member of the Mei clan (Korean actor Chen Liang) pretends to sell out his clan by going to the bandit hideout and giving them the treasure map, which has come into his possession. This pleases the bad guys to no end because now they say gleefully that they won't have to work – but cutting of arms and killing people seemed more like fun than work.

Pei-pei takes a fancy to the newcomer and gets all giggly with her "sister" Lily Li (in a non-action role), but the number three chief has his own eyes set on marrying into the family business and attempts to kill Chen on a number of occasions. Seeing this romance beginning to bloom, the sister (Chao Hsin Yen) of Number 3 tries to get Chen married to Lily instead – but this forces Pei-pei's old wet nurse (Ouyang Shafei) to tell her some painful truths about her past. Up to this point really very little of interest has happened – lots of meandering skullduggery but very little action – but that is about to change as the truth sets Cheng Pei-pei down a path of mass death and destruction – and all of a sudden this film gets very entertaining. The action choreography tends to be a bit soggy and slow, but watching Pei-pei cut through men like warm orange marmalade is one of life's little pleasures.

**13 Styles Strike, The (Taiwan, 1979: Cheung Ying) - aka 8th Wonder of Kung Fu** - This is a bad but unintentionally funny late '70s oddity from Taiwan that supposedly takes place during the Republic, but so low-budget, you can't tell it's a period piece. Story is typical "I must defeat the Japanese bastards and save my school's reputation". The kung fu is awful (all of the hero's 13 styles look spastic). Chen Sing plays a sickly sifu, and does nothing except take a beating. Trivia buffs: there is a cameo by Frank deMaria, student of famed shauji-jiao master Shang Tung Sheng. Unfortunately, Frank comes off looking terrible with his wild facial expressions and lousy choreography. His polyester slacks don't help.

**36<sup>th</sup> Chamber of Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1978: Lau Kar-Leung)** - Gordon Liu (also known as Lau Kar Fai) stars as a young man who's friends and family have been killed by the new government. He wakes up at the Shaolin Temple, a place he has only heard about a couple of times. When he realizes he is at the best place possible to learn kung fu, he begs and begs to learn so that he can revenge his family. He does finally get taught, but has to start with the basics. Every part of his body must become stronger before he can learn how to fight. After he finishes the first stages of training in record time, he is now highly respected and moves onto learning actual fighting styles. He breezes through this and becomes a great fighter in only 5 years or so. This is not one of those movies that has 1 or 2 training sequences. Gordon is shown in at least 13 of the chambers and half of the movie is spent at Shaolin. So

after he has become a master fighter, he is given a high honor and told that he can become second in charge of any of the 35 chambers. A senior monk played by the great Lee Hoi San objects to this and says that he can't have this honor unless Gordon defeats him in a weapons duel. Lee Hoi San does not play a villain, but he does not think that Gordon is a good enough fighter to receive so much praise. His plan works better than he could have ever imagined. He ends up helping Gordon improve as a fighter and as a person. Gordon is told he can leave Shaolin now, and he goes to take revenge on the evil General who killed his family.

One thing that sets this movie apart is that it tries to be a real movie, and it succeeds. Watching Gordon grow up into a man is remarkable to see. The commentators didn't notice, but a lot of the stuff in this movie is very real. When Gordon has to use the pole with the weight on the end to hit the bell over and over again, that is a real weight on the end of the pole! Gordon talks in the interview (included on this disc) about how the sabres that Lo Lieh uses in the final fight are real, and it just makes the movie that much better. Don't expect your average tale of revenge. I was touched deeply when I first saw this and there are not many kung fu movies that have as much meaning and feeling.

**36 Crazy Fists, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Chen Hi-Hwa) - aka Master and the Boxer; The Blood Pact** - If you like classic late 1970s comedy kung fu, this will do it for you. Choreographed by Jackie Chan, and it shows. The techniques are typical of the era, very similar to the ones in "Snake in eagle's shadow" and the non-drunk stuff from "Drunken Master 1": acrobatic, colorful moves derived from various southern Chinese styles (hung gar playing a large role). Some impressive chain whip by Fung Hak On, with the hero on double baht-jarm do. The film as a whole is not unlike those in tone, too. As expected, there is a very good villain at the end (one of the Yuens) who kicks everyone's ass (this guy is also the villain in "Once Upon a Time in China" and "Master Strikes").

**36 Deadly Styles, The (Hong Kong, 1979: Joseph Kuo) - a.k.a 36 Deadly Styles** - The merciless Silver Fox (Hwang Jang Lee) and his Master Yeung Cheng-Tien (Mark Long) of the Min-Chu gang, are hellbent on acquiring the 36 Deadly Styles Manual. Meanwhile Kung Fu fighter Wai Chi (Cheung Nik), is being taught Martial Arts at a temple, under the tuition of monk (Yeung Chak-Lam). The Silver Fox killed his Master's brother, and the other gang member skilled Wia's uncle (Sham Chin-Bo). Their paths must cross again, in an encounter only one will walk away from.

*"The fella's crazy, let's forget about him"*

Hong Hwa International Films (H.K) present, this Joseph Kuo directed Kung Fu comedy filmed in Taiwan. Opening with some psychedelic looking credits accompanied by the catchy Big Gundown theme tune. This production gets off to a strong start, despite some freaky antics from a red nosed Chan Lau (The Dragon, The Hero). My first impression of this movie, is that it may have been un-finished film, that was integrated into a new production?. Or perhaps it's just the way the movies been filmed and edited together?. Maybe the international print was shortened too?. What ever happened, the story can be hard to follow at times. Some cast members never interact with others, with one scene possibly featuring a Hwang Jang Lee body double?. Despite all this, the movie is worth watching if you dig your old-school movies.

Actor Max Lee Chiu-Chun (Magnificent Butcher), handles the fight choreography, that varies from average to excellent. With most of the average action being heavily dosed with Kung Fu comedy humour and hi-jinks. The movies opening, and the closing half hour are the high lights. Like a lot of Seasonal Films inspired actioners of the late 70's, the middle of the movie drags a bit. With our hero Wai Chi often winding up the temple monks, and playing practical jokes on them. Or scene's such as the one where Chan Lua, goes to the nearby temple in drag, so he can find out some information. We can forgive many of the dim-witted Kung Fu movie characters from being fooled by this old trope. However, even the temple abbot Pak Sha-Lik (Way Of The Black Dragon) gets fooled by it. Despite Chan Lua forgetting to shave of his quirky facial hair. There's even a comedy monk duo, featuring none of them, Au-Yeung from Hitman In The Hand Of Buddha.

*"Nice place you got here, make a nice grave yard"*

The movie features the first ever movie pairing of screen super villains Bolo Yeung & Hwang Jang Lee. Who would later go onto appear alongside each other in Challenge Of The Tiger, made the following year. Like so many of Bolo's roles, his talents here are not put to the best use. At least he's not just given a brief cameo, before getting killed off, or laying down some pain on a poor victim. His trademark hulking size is also kept undercover, and his face is

equally obscured by an odd platted dark red wig. The wig looks kinda like dreadlocks, so it gives him this odd Chinese Rasta vibe. When Wai Chi first clamps eyes on him, he plants his face in a pile of flour, and then proceeds to act like he's nuts, in order to get away from him. The way Wai Chi behaves, smashing stalls up with a large piece of bamboo and acting like a complete loony tune, means it might not just have been a pile of flour he pushed his head into?.

They really could have done a lot more with Bolo, apart from seeing him paired with Hwang Jang Lee, he does get into a few brief scuffles, and he's still around by the time we reach the finale. However, he's looked a lot better in other movies such Ten Magnificent Killers and The Tatoo Connection. For a big guy, he was really-agile on his feet and he could kick well. While he may not be on the level of Hwang Jang Lee, in term of legwork, he could get his leg higher than most people give him credit for. I guess in the 1970's world of Hong Kong cinema, just the novelty of having such a well-built guy in a movie was enough?. Meaning they didn't have to make such a big effort with most of his screen characters action-wise. Something that become less and less unique as the 70s turned into the 80's, when even more musclebound villains and heroes started to appear in movies.

*"That tiny volume, upset the whole Martial world"*

Korean hard man and fighter Hwang Jang Lee is often seen as this-movies main attraction. Featured prominently on the films posters, artwork, VHS and DVD releases. There's no doubt his character is one of the productions strong points. He has a series of brief but entertaining fights with Wong Wing-San and Mau Ging-Shun among others, as he searches for the 36 deadly styles Kung Fu manual. His trade mark kicking skills are made good use of here, as he takes out fighters with ease. Even arrogantly holding his hands behind his back at times, while still clobbering his opponent into a stupor. Fan Mei-Shang and Yeung Chak-Lam's characters have already encountered the silver fox's wrath. They still feel the pain of his heavy duty kicking years later, which is only eased by medicine. Or in the case of Chak-Lam's sickly-looking monk character, only reptile soup and snake blood tonics sooth the pain.

Around the one hour, six-minute mark, there's a curious flashback sequence which is supposed to feature Hwang Jang Lee. However, for some reason you never get to see his face. Which would make sense, if you didn't already know it was him. The scene features a cameo from choreographer Max Lee with Fan Mei-Sheng, and Yeung Chak-Lam fighting Hwang Jang Lee and his lackeys. Only you never see the silver fox's face in any shot. Maybe this scene was added when Hwang Jang Lee had already film his scenes and left the production?. Or maybe it is him, and they the producers changed their minds about concealing his characters identity?. I'd like to hear other Kung Fu Fandom members/readers opinions on this one.

*"Ive been waiting for you, waiting for ten years"*

Max Lee's fight direction really comes into its own, in the last thirty minutes. The best example being the two fights in the finale, which are intercut with each other. However, it's the secondary characters encounter that really steals the show. With the two Long brothers, Mark and Jack going all out in a shape's fest of fight. Filmed at a familiar red clay location, that's been used in many Taiwanese films. There's also a great exchange between the two on-screen masters pre-to their dust up. Meanwhile our heroes facing Bolo and the silver fox, with Cheung Nik really getting to show his moves. While his encounters with the two min-chu thugs are entertaining, especially the fight with Hwang Jang Lee. They don't quite reach the heights of the other final fight. It's as if Joseph Kuo was really trying to go all out, but somehow it doesn't quite gel. Which could be said about the movie as a whole. Some reviews either seem to knock the film, while others state it's an underrated gem. My opinion sits somewhere in the middle. This movie could have been one of the all-time classics, and while it fails in some parts, it succeeds very well in others. There's some good training segments for example, we could just have done with more of it. In-particular Fan Mei-Shang's training of the great Jeannie Chang and Cheung Nik.

*"You old bastard, so you studied it, learnt it welll, then destroyed the book, so only you know it"*

Jeannie Chang is on top form here, and she gets a good amount of screen time which is a plus. Her performance is really-good, playing a strong-willed character who doesn't hide from trouble. While I've yet to see all, of her small filmography, she always delivers a good physical performance. I feel she should have been included in the finale a lot more. After some fighting, they make her stand on the side lines with her father, while Cheung Nik tries to survive the Silver Fox's kicking assault. Chan Lau is in full blown Dean Shek mode in this one, thankfully his character isn't around for the whole run time. Some of the scenes have been shot in the Hong Kong new territories, with the familiar run down abandoned villagers, doubling as a town and temple. Fan Mei Shang character even lives in the same building they used for many of his Magnificent Butcher scenes.



This is by no means a must-see movie, but it's more than worth watching once for fans of the cast. Veteran director Joseph Kuo has made better pictures than this average outing, that features some strong stand out action in parts. I just feel he did much better with the likes of *Born Invincible* and *The Fearless Duo*, both made the previous year.

**Thirty-Six Sword Guards (Hong Kong, 1971: Gwan Jing-leung)** - Tien Ni plays a young man (I think so because her servant calls her Gongze instead of Guniang (lady) )who wants to avenge her father's death. Along with her servant, they meet a monk who tells her that years ago, they were 36 sworn brothers who were attacked by an evil man and his troops and almost all killed. Later, she meets three other girls and other survivors of the 36 sworn brothers and they all look for the murderers. They finally find them after a lot of twists and fights and Tien Ni discovers that her father is still alive but badly hurt by the evil man, who they all succeed in killing with the help of Tien Ni's servant, who played an almost idiot man but finally was a good fighter. Very good swordplay movie.

**37 Plots of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1982: Wong Gwok-Chue) - Aka No. 37 Plot** - I had high hopes for this movie. I mean, it promised a reunion of sorts between the Chinese Super Ninja himself, Ricky Cheng, and Ga Hoi. Those had worked magic together in the Taiwanese independent kung fu masterpiece *Seven Steps of Kung Fu*. So perhaps this would be one of the unsung heroes of old school chopsoy cinema. Sadly, that was not the case. The film plays like a cheap, shoddy rip-off of *The Drunken Master* in which Cheng is too inexperienced to make the comic fights work and director Wong Gwok Chue (who had a pretty distinguished career as a fight choreographer before directing movies like this and *Fight Among the Supers*) shows that he had no idea how Yuen Woo-Ping was able to make his kung fu comedies work.

The film focuses on a pair of bumbling salesmen/con artists, played by Hui Bat-Lu (known as the "Taiwan Chaplin", who showed up in Angela Mao's *Dance of Death* and *Fantasy Mission Force*) and Chin Lung (who did some limited action director work on movies like *Cute Foster Sister* and *Hello Dracula*). In the first scene, they save an injured fighter from some thugs, whom they hide at their mother's house so he can be nursed back to the health. This story thread, which will feed into the main conflict, will be almost completely forgotten until nearly an hour later. The first two thirds of the film focus mainly on the leads' comic shenanigans...which aren't very comical to begin with. So we just have some random set pieces involved con artist schemes with the occasional fight played for laughs until finally the main bad guy (Ga Hoi) shows up at the boys' house looking for the injured fellow from the first scene. A fight breaks out between the villain, his men, the injured guy, and the boys' mother. In the end, the injured guy, the mother and the boys' cute sister(?) are murdered. So the boys meet up with the local non-union Mexican counterpart to Sam Seed (played by *Fearless Hyena*'s Chan Wai-Lau) to train for revenge.

Like I said, the problem here is the pacing. FAR TOO MUCH TIME is spent spinning the wheels until it's time to settle the score with the bad guy. In a better film, the first act would be dedicated to establishing the characters, the second act would be about training and some minor fights, and the last act would be a series of escalating fights culminating in the final showdown. That doesn't happen here. The protagonists goof off and mug at the camera for about an hour. They train for all of two minutes (seven if you count the five-minute sequence in which they perform kung fu sets for the casino owner who had bested them earlier \*before\* finally beating him up) and then we go to the final fights. The "serious" fights are far too few and the training itself isn't very inspired, so in the end we're left with an annoying comedy with some martial arts in it, but not much else.

In a lot of movies that follow the so-called Seasonal Formula, which started with *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, the hero trains in one style only to be defeated by the bad guy and thus has to train in a second style (such as Jackie Chan learning first the Snake Fist Style and then the Cat's Claw technique). Well, earlier in the movie, it is established that the protagonists' schemes often end in violence, in which case one of them carries a kung fu manual that he reads and tells the other guy what technique to use at a given moment. Well, once their initial bout with Ga Hoi ends in their defeat, they actually use the manual to \*learn\* the style contained therein and incorporate it into their knowledge, instead of just occasionally glancing at it when need be. I thought that was a sort of interesting idea.

Ricky Cheng was at the start of his career when he worked on this and was still a little green in the ears when it came to choreographing action. So his work is mainly uninspired and forgettable. There's a certain choreography and crispness to the humorous fights from the old school Yuen Woo-Ping, Sammo Hung, and Jackie Chan movies. Thus even when the stakes aren't high, the scuffles are a lot of fun to watch. Cheng doesn't quite grasp that here, so most of the kerfuffles in the first hour just drag on and on. Once the action settles into the more mannered and complex late 70s fare, it gets a little better, but not by much. The main leads are certainly acrobatic, but the only fighter who impresses is Ga Hoi, who, between some nice kicks and his hair, I swear was directed by Wong Gwok

Chue to be imitating Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee. He's easily the best (albeit most underused) part of the film.

**Thou Shall Not Kill...But Once (Taiwan, 1975: Ulysses Au Yeung-Jun)** - Title gives it all away really. Chen Sing joins the Shaolin temple looking for revenge but gains spiritual enlightenment. His fellow brother (played by Michael Chan) doesn't and falls victim to the temptations of wealth and flesh. Fights ensue.

Ok, it's not thoroughly fair to label *Thou Shall Not Kill...But Once* as just another kung-fu movie as director Au Yeung-Jun does display fairly good storytelling competence and ambition to stand out in a very crowded room. First half definitely benefits more from this as the atmosphere ever so slightly feels fresh for the genre and it's a vehicle suitable for Chen Sing's range as an actor. Not that I would expect it but fact of the matter is, there existed an opportunity here to leave out much of the martial arts without consequence and it's also a fact that Au don't distinguish himself in any way when concentrating on the fighting. For the moments where it does try, albeit in a crude way, *Thou Shall Not Kill ... But Once* is worthy of respect.

**Thousand Mile Escort (Taiwan, 1976: Hsu Tseng-Hung)** - "Thousand Miles Escort" is made watchable by the great Lo Lieh, here playing a villain who serves Shin Wei, the prime minister of China who is in rebellion against the throne and who is conspiring to hand the country over to the invading Tartars. Or it may be that Shin Wei is conspiring with the king to extend martial law throughout all of China. Whichever is the case, there is a letter that explains it all and that everyone is trying to find. The title refers to the journey that righteous swordsman Zen Ja Ti, played by Pai Ying, and his nephew embark upon in order to deliver the letter to a loyal general whose troops are facing the Tartars.

Lo Lieh as Shao Leung is at first is completely despicable—he supervises and takes part in the slaughter of the entire family of a Privy Councilor who is loyal to the king—the only person to escape is the nephew. Later he undergoes a change of heart and decides he must do what is right for China, then once again becomes a bloodthirsty maniac when his wife, a trained assassin, is killed by Zen Ja Ti. She was trying to kill him and was sent on this mission by Shao. The butcher's bill is quite high—basically everyone who appears in the movie, with three exceptions, are dead before the final credits roll.

Structurally "Thousand Miles Escort" is a real dog's breakfast. The person upon whose actions the entire plot is erected, the king, never appears. There is almost no transition from a scene set in one time and place to another—there is a lot of "meanwhile, back at the palace" or "meanwhile, back at the waterfall". The film is full of flashbacks, including one to a scene that happened several minutes before—what happened in the scene (the death of Shao's wife and her henchman) had been described and discussed already but, maybe to make sure that no one missed anything, it was shown again. A gang of thugs, who turn out to be good guys, show up in the very first scene, then again for a couple of seconds and then disappear for good. There is a lot of exposition of the dullest sort—people standing around and talking about what is happening somewhere else.

There were plenty of Shaw Brothers trademarks—opulent costumes, beautiful women, perfect hair and makeup on everyone. The action scenes ranged from quite good to dreadful—most of them were simply dull although the ultimate battle between Lo Lieh, Pai Ying and Chia Ling is very well done and exciting. One quite brutal scene had Pai Ying faced with an ambush by a platoon of the prime minister's soldiers. He lured them into a house then pulled the house down around them. Some were crushed and the rest he stabbed as they tried to escape. Pai Ying uses a staff that shoots daggers, Lo Lieh a sword and Chia Ling a spear. All seem quite good with their weapons of choice but it is Lo Lieh, of course, who really stands out.

The movie ends with the same shot with which it began, which could mean a number of things. It might point to the cycle of death and regeneration. It could be that the director realized that all the other characters were dead so there wasn't anything else for him to do. Or perhaps he was just as tired shooting the movie as the audience was sick of watching it. But it did end and not a moment too soon.

Recommended only for fans of Lo Lieh who want to own everything he was in.  
Reviewer Score:

**Three Evil Masters (Hong Kong, 1980: Tony Liu Chun-Ku) – The Master** - Chen Kuan Tai plays a kung fu master on the run from a gang called the 3 Evils. Johnny Wang Lung Wei is their leader and these 3 are super tough. After getting injured, Kuan Tai looks for shelter at a young man's house. Yuen Tak plays the young man and stays at a kung fu school. He was taken in as an orphan and has lived there for about 3 years. He gladly takes Kuan Tai in and

they begin a very friendly teacher and student relationship. Yuen Tak is not an actor and would never fit in at playing a serious role, but this is a comedy and he does a great job as the lead actor. Lau Hok Nin plays the school's master and he is not exactly a fan of Kuan Tai because of their troubles in the past. The story is well done and more than enjoyable all the way through. It's not surprising since it is directed by Lu Chun Ku who has done many good movies including 'The Postman Strikes Back' with Ti Lung and *Holy Fame of the Martial World*. He has worked together with Lau Hok Nin and action director Hsu Hsia before. Lau Hok Nin is even better in this than he was in *Hell's Widstaff* and *Tiger Over Wall*, both being directed by Lu Chun Ku. Not only is he a wonderful character actor, but he is no slouch in the kung fu department either. The action is absolutely superb and the entire movie is fight filled. Not a single scene looks rushed, and I always love it when they save the best for last.

While the story is well done, it also has a lot of unique touches to it. One of the 3 evil masters is a ladies man and his scene in a brothel is not one you will soon forget. The nudity does get a bit excessive, but Yuen Tak steals the show by dressing up as a woman. I was amazed to see all the jiggling boobies, but I had no idea the scene would turn out to be so funny.

To go along with the amazing action scenes and great acting and directing job, there is also a very fun soundtrack and beautiful cinematography. It is always nice to see the Shaw Brothers outdoor sets. I could have used a little more comedy out of Chan Lau, but other than that, I can only think of one other fault. Lung Wei uses a hair braid very effectively as a weapon, but it only seems to cut up clothes rather than cut up the body or face. It's a minor gripe, but there are some good blood effects for death scenes, and Lung Wei is an absolute madman with a spear in his hands. There is a lot to be happy about. If you are not a fan of the genre, it may get boring at times, but all hardcore kung fu fans will be delighted with this classic.

**Three Famous Constables (Taiwan, 1978: Cheung San Yi)** - While pretty much bereft of plot 'Three Famous Constables' is still worth a watch for the well crafted action scenes that interject proceedings at regular intervals.

What plot there is involves two government officials being called upon to investigate and destroy the feared 'Death Clan' who have been making a bit of nuisance of themselves of late; killing as many rival martial artists as they can. To add a bit of intrigue there's also the stoic and mysterious 'Wolf Warrior' who seems to be following his own agenda against the death clan (...wonder who the third constable is gonna be ?)

To be fair this wasn't the best version of the film to watch (full screen with subtitles going off the side and not a first generation copy either) so any character development or plot intricacies were probably lost on me. However there didn't seem to be much to it other than a series of fights culminating in the final assault on the 'Death Clans' secret hideout.

Obviously influenced by spaghetti westerns from the 'man with no name' character to the soundtrack bearing more than a slight resemblance to 'For A Few Dollars More' but the film doesn't manage to recreate the tension typical of that film. The fight scenes are fast and furious affairs and quite well filmed using unusual camera angles and editing. The final showdown sees some interesting fantasy elements introduced and a little bit of wirework to enhance the action.

**Thunderbolt (Hong Kong, 1973: Joe Law)** - The Dragon Fort is infiltrated by Hung Wei (Pai Ying) of the Black Tiger Gang and after being destroyed from within, this is the most powerful fort on the block. Chu (Angela Mao) and Chen Ying Chieh (James Tien) survive the violent takeover and try and fight their way back to power. Chen in particular Hung Wei wants as he has a crucial tattoo on his back all the heads of the Dragon Fort also share. It's sometimes jarring seeing Angela Mao and the regular Golden Harvest crew in a Wuxia piece but director Law Chi (The Crippled Master) shows off the world nicely, with violence, bloodshed and otherworldly techniques (such as Pai Ying's whirlwind kick). Chen Kuan-Tai's action does strike a good balance between grounded and high flying though, with the end being a particular good showcase for Angela Mao hacking and slashing through a continuous flow of opponents.

**Thunderbolt Fist, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Il-Ho)** - Perfectly acceptable response to or echo of The Chinese Boxer, the versus Japanese and revenge storyline is present but with a loud, brutal edge to it that doesn't make it seem as that much of a copy. Especially not since Korean director Chang Il-Ho presents the Japanese as gleeful

killers and the gritty and messy basher action enhances the cruel aura. All acting as a springboard for the obvious lift from the Jimmy Wang Yu classic as our hero gets crippled, learns the titular technique and in such a powerful way he'll be able to burst through walls and torsos. Loud and bloody, Shaw Brothers do well copying their own established formula. Starring Chuen Yuen and Shih Szu who lets loose effectively in one of the latter brawls.

**Thundering Mantis, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Teddy Yip)** - After letting him know that I hadn't seen *The Thundering Mantis*, ShaOwlInDude told me to either review Mantis movies this month or Leung Kar Yan movies, and clearly, I chose the latter. *The Thundering Mantis* was a movie that I had been meaning to see for a long time, but I didn't really feel a huge obligation to watch it for some reason (probably because I've been on a Shaw Brothers binge lately). But still, I love Leung Kar Yan's other movies, particularly *The Victim* and *Legend of a Fighter*, so I had no problem with having to watch it.

Also, if you're a kung fu movie fan, you've definitely heard of *The Thundering Mantis*. It's often considered one of those all time classic movies that everyone's heard of. But even then, I'm not always the biggest fans of movies that are considered the all time best kung fu movies. Sure, I definitely liked *Invincible Armour* and *The Hot, the Cool, and the Vicious*, but there are many other movies that I prefer ten times more. I was definitely open-minded when watching this movie, not really knowing what to expect.

My expectations grew significantly after watching the opening though. The opening to this movie is terrific. It has a lot of energy and great music ("Brutes and Savages" by Riz Ortolani). Immediately following that, we're introduced to Ah Chi (Leung Kar Yan) who works at a stall that sells fish. He's also a martial artist who tries to protect the townspeople from members of an evil gang and the gang wants to get even with him. Ah Chi meets an obnoxious kid (Wong Yat Lung). In order to defend himself from the gang, he learns Mantis style from the kid's grandfather (Chin Yuet Sang).

The plot is pretty straightforward in this movie and unfortunately I felt that this movie was fraught with unfunny and sometimes uneventful scenes. This certainly isn't one of the better kung fu comedies though it certainly seems to try. The first half of the movie doesn't have much to offer, but it does have Leung Kar Yan being extremely likable and Wong Yat Lung showing off his amazing skills. Leung Kar Yan is very charismatic in this movie. Even when he acts like a total jerk, I still found him very entertaining. Also, Wong Yat Lung's skills never cease to amaze me.

By the time the third act comes around, the movie really starts to pick up its pace. There are a few entertaining training scenes and a fun fight scene with Wong Yat Lung using Drunken Style but then the movie becomes surprisingly dark. The plot intensifies, some characters die, and our heroes are struggling to survive. This leads to one of the most unexpectedly/hilariously brutal finales in any kung fu movie ever. The choreography isn't the best, but it's just jaw-dropping to see what's going on. You're just waiting to see what's going to happen next.

*The Thundering Mantis* certainly has a few flaws. The first half of the movie is kinda slow and doesn't have many scenes worth mentioning. The second half is where the pace starts to speed up. I usually give movies a break if they're at least entertaining, but this movie has little entertainment value besides the opening, the fight scenes, and the last 30 minutes or so. And it's hard to call this movie one of the all time classics when other films like *The Victim* or *Legend of a Fighter* are better in nearly every aspect: the story, the characters, the fight choreography, the comedy. And in those movies, the fight scenes aren't the only entertaining scenes in the movie. Both movies are even quite affecting. Yeah, I definitely don't like this movie as much as most, but I'd be lying if I said that Leung Kar Yan's performance and the finale didn't make this movie worth the price of admission.

**Thundering Sword, The (Hong Kong, 1967: Hsu Tseng-Hung)** - If Douglas Sirk had directed a Hong Kong sword fighting film in the mid-60's it may have been a lot like this one. Surrounding the intermittent action sequences are large dollops of fatalistic melodrama and cascading orchestral arrangements that practically turn this into a new sub-genre – the weepy swordplay. Made in 1967 at a time in which the days of melodrama and movie queens ruling the screen with such fare as "The Blue and Black" and "Till the End of Time" were coming to an end and martial arts films were on the ascendancy for the next decade, this film straddles both worlds very effectively with an oft told tale of star crossed lovers.

After coming out of a three-month meditation in a cabinet, the Master of Baiyon Temple (Tien Feng) declares to his three main disciples (Lo Lieh, Ching Yi and Shu Pei Pei) that the Thundering Sword must be found and destroyed because if its powers fell into the wrong hands it could destroy the world. He sends out the two good friends Chiang (Lo Lieh) and Yu (Ching Yi) on a mission to find the sword while Chiang's sister Gia Hsia (Shu Pei Pei) remains behind.

to look after things and to pine for Yu. It soon turns out that a rival clan – The Centipede Clan (though translated into Caterpillar in the subs!) are also searching for the sword – but not for the altruistic reasons that Baiyong Temple has – but instead so that they can dominate the martial arts world.

Yu soon comes upon So Jiao Jiao (Cheng Pei Pei) astride a horse and being attacked by a group of robbers looking for the Thundering Sword, but with whip in hand she quickly makes mincemeat of them and looks quite pleased with herself for having done so. Seeing Yu on foot she assumes he is also one of the gang and attacks him as well but he easily fends it off with a few words of non-violence – “Don’t kill people so easily” to which she replies, “If I kill people, it’s not your concern”. Tough words but in fact Jiao is immediately love struck at finding a man of her physical equal and as she rides away smiling she breaks into song that displays her coy feminine side! It turns out that she is the daughter of the head of the Centipede Clan and has many of that clan’s personality quirks – arrogance, prone to needless violence and a tendency to slap around the help when the mood strikes. Not necessarily the kind of girl, Yu would want to bring back for his Master’s consent, but he finds himself falling in love with her nonetheless. That Pei Pei is stunning in this film goes a long way towards explaining this.

A series of tragic errors by the hotheaded lass creates a tangled web of complications that clouds this romance almost immediately. She comes across Chiang who has found the Thundering Sword and not knowing who he is she poisons him with three darts to the chest and then realizes she doesn’t have the antidote. Later disguised as Yu (the standard female dressed as a male ploy that no one ever sees through), she decides that thirty-two men badly need a killing and proceeds to do so – but this leads to Yu being charged with the crime and finally she betrays her own clan with her love for Yu. She has a lot of explaining to do!

Director Hsu Cheng-hung (Temple of the Red Lotus) heats up this plot into a boiling emotional overflow that suddenly scalds you with its force and intensity. Cheng Pei Pei who spent nearly her entire career in martial arts films shows a true flair for the dramatic here and one can only have wished that her acting career had been a little more varied and given her more opportunities such as this to show her acting range. By the end of this you feel run over by her sadness. This film may not have the requisite amount of action for many martial arts fans (though the trailer would make you think otherwise), but it’s a terrifically involving story with excellent production values, solid acting and characters with a modicum of depth. Another intriguing aspect of the film is that it doesn’t paint the villains entirely in black, but gives them an aspect of redemption as this theme along with that of forgiveness run through the film. Along for the ride are also Wu Ma as the chief of security for the Centipede Clan, Ku Feng as the man looking for justice for the thirty two dead men and Chen Hung-lieh (The Jade Faced Tiger in *Come Drink with Me*) as Jiao’s brother.

**Tiger and Crane Fists (Taiwan, 1976: Jimmy Wang Yu)** - I imagine that by the mid-1970s, Jimmy Wang Yu had figured out that what with the Chang Cheh's Shaolin cycle of films featuring handsome actors like Alexander Fu Sheng and Chi Kuan Chun performing the *hung gar* style front and center, that movies featuring him wildly flailing his arms at evil Japanese villains just weren't going to cut it with audiences anymore. His principle strategy seemed to be out-weirding his competition, with crazy films like *Master of the Flying Guillotine* and *Return of the Chinese Boxer*.

With this film, however, he seems to be making an earnest attempt to ride the *hung gar* train that was taking Chang Cheh and the Shaw Bros. studio to box office success. Here the film not only highlights the tiger and crane styles that compose the bulk of *hung gar*'s techniques, but he even brought in Lau Kar-Wing, brother of Lau Kar-Leung and a solid filmmaker, action director, and actor in his own right, to be the action director and co-star. Nonetheless, the film still ends up being an average film that would've faded into obscurity had Steve Oedekerk not resurrected it as *Kung Pow: Enter the Fist* in 2001.

Many years ago, the tiger-crane style was the best in the land. However, in one generation, two students learned the tiger and crane styles separately, intent on combining their strengths after each student had mastered the technique. Unfortunately, the crane master decided to challenge the tiger master to a duel and lost. After that, the two masters broke up, never combining each other's technique like they had planned to.

At the beginning of the film, the Tiger Master is attacked and killed by Lu Tin-Chu (Lung Fei, who fought against Wang Yu in over 25 films during the 1970s). His student, Sing Chan (Jimmy Wang Yu, *One-Armed Boxer*) takes refuge at the crane school. The crane master orders his senior student, Lu Kang (Lau Kar-Wing, *The Odd Couple*) to learn the tiger style and teach the crane style to Sing Chan. He's a bit reluctant at first, but eventually gives in.

Meanwhile, Lu Tin-Chu is out making deals with the Japanese and trying to suppress the local kung fu masters. This brings him into conflict with the old crane master. Lu fights him twice and kills him with his trusty claws-on-a-chain weapon. Lu Kang seeks revenge and is killed for his troubles, too. Sing Chan is left alone (well, he does have Lu

Kang's ex-girlfriend to take care of him and give him support) and must master the crane technique and find away to get to Lu Tin-Chu's weak points.

Strangely enough, the inclusion of a sub-plot involving the Japanese seems to be included only because it's not a Jimmy Wang Yu film if the Japanese aren't badmouthed in some way. I say that because no actual Japanese character appears in the film, and it has very little bearing on the rest of the events of the film. Beyond that, the film does very little to get out of the whole you-killed-my-master/colleague plot.

The action scenes are orchestrated by Lau Kar-Wing, a hung gar master, and they're not bad. Most of the fights are pretty short until the end. Jimmy Wang Yu doesn't look bad performing the tiger and crane styles (he is a bit hunchy when he does it, kind of giving away that he's not an actual martial artist) and has a rather ingenious way of getting past Lung Fei's claw weapon at the climax--he uses a string of firecrackers to wrap around the chain and then blow it to pieces. Most of the flailing in the film comes from a quartet of flunkies that follow Lung Fei around and beat people with the sticks they carry.

One of the more interesting bits of the film is that Lung Fei's weak points are a pair of metal spikes embedded in his skin, which the characters desperately try to rip out. I was wondering what the point of that was, considering that it's a harder and more suspenseful fight when you don't know where the weak point is. But then, I guess even that cliché needed a bit of dressing up by that point.

To be perfectly honest, I've never seen *Kung Pow: Enter the Fist*, although I plan to in the near future. There's not a whole lot to recommend this film for, though fans of Jimmy Wang Yu or the Lau Clan may dig it. Other than that, the only real reason to see it is if you've seen the film it would become and want to compare the two.

**Tiger At Top (Taiwan, 1975: But Fu)** - An 80-minute movie with about 75% of the running time devoted to fighting. The story is very confused though the plot itself is very simple: a guy is put in charge of transporting a cargo of gold, but a bunch of bandits want to rob him. On the way, two people get involved and try helping him. But the story is so badly told that it gets convoluted as you don't get why everyone wants to kill this guy nor have a clue on next to anything. There's also some guy showing up and helping the good guys - his random appearances and the lack of exposition makes this point hard to understand, but at least he delivers in terms of action.

Speaking of which, this movie has a huge part of it devoted to fighting (as I said) but the fight scenes are boring. No shapes or anything that stands out (except some weird stuff with the villain that produces psychedelic effects and seems to make him stronger).

Also, the copy featured in the set is pretty bad. Some grain at points, washed out colors at others, some scenes get too dark, other times the sound gets off... There's even a big mess up at a point when the screen looks as though the VHS it's ripped from crashes. Probably the worst of the set so far in terms of quality and as far as the movie itself goes, I'm not sure which between this and *Mantis Under Falcon's Claws* is the worse - I recall Mantis... having a funny character and I think it ACTUALLY had Animal styles in it, so I guess maybe *Tiger* (or *Tigers* ?) *At Top* takes the cake, if we may say so.

**Tiger Force (Hong Kong, 1975: Joseph Kong)** - Best friends (Michael Chan and Chen Sing) reunite but on a criminal path. One's a cop, gang warfare and fights ensue. Starting with a slow, clunky car chase and thrusting us into excellent, fast and gritty martial arts action, the production showcases an action-volume for sure. More successful in this physical department they all knew rather than the gunplay (some individual squib work is effective however), ultimately there's not enough of the outstanding. Glimpses get us through it and a 72 minute running time makes it all marginal recommendation.

**Tiger from Hong Kong (Taiwan, 1973: Chang Yi) – aka Superfoot; Chinese Dragon** - Chang Yi plays a man who has been falsely accused to be a murderer and he escapes. He arrives in a town where his girlfriend works. There, he fights with Lung Fei's men, who bully the villagers and take all the men in order to force them to work in their mine. Finally, he discovers that it's Lung Fei who had ordered to murder the man who he was accused to have killed and he gets rid of him. That's a very good non stop action movie and Chang Yi is great in all his fights in this one. Worth watching.

**Tiger Jungle (Taiwan, 1976: Ting Chung)** - Although the angle of the Japanese wanting the resources of a land of tribe people is not common in the martial arts genre, Tiger Jungle is still largely uninspired genre-fare. Featuring no snap to the pace, extended scenes of dancing and anonymous romance subplots, the extensive star of the show may have fury and grit but it doesn't jump out at you as it should. Not even as a distraction. Man Kong-Lung stars and Han Ying-Chieh is the villain.

**Tiger Love (Taiwan, 1980: Lin I Hsiu)** - Tiger Love sees Hu Chin (The House of 72 Tenants) and Lo Lieh as lovers separated by death. Or so they think as they both survive without knowing about each others fate. He goes on with his life, she is saved by the love of a tiger and conceives a child who she brings up alongside Uncle Tiger. As an adult (here played by Stephen Tung), he seeks up his father but soon starts a deadly feud when he falls in love with the daughter of a rival family...

The initial stages of Tiger Love borderlines on perverse and disturbing as director Lin I Hsiu seems to suggest Hu Chin is impregnated by the tiger but that soon is explained the logical way thankfully. Early on, the filmmakers also show the child actor playing Stephen Tung's character seemingly being attacked for real by the tiger, showcasing that any piece of footage is worth keeping in a Hong Kong film. When the dust has settled and Tiger Love reveals its intentions, it's nothing more than another martial arts entry. However no choreography of note takes place and leans more towards the swiny arms and legs choreography style of the early 70s despite the film being shot way later than that. Stephen Tung is also a blank and dorky hero while Lo Lieh phones in his performance. Hu Chin remains largely clothed in a tiger skin outfit for the majority of the film. She obviously gets a positive grade.

Tiger Love ultimately is dull and easily forgotten but director Lin makes the final 20 minutes a lot more entertaining as he decides to make a horror movie all of a sudden as the titular tiger goes on the revenge path!

**Tiger Of Northland (Hong Kong, 1976: Peng Chang-Kuei)** - Watched it. The guy is flexible but stiff, acting wise. He does look like he could kick and amazing amount of ass. Samo looks like a big joke as well as Tony Liu. This dude was hard core. On the flip side he couldn't act his way out of a paper bag. Still, it's worth a watch, and I'd probably watch it again, just to see what a human steamroller looks like again.

**Tiger on the River Kwai, The (Italy, 1975: Franco Lattanzi)** - Aka: *O Vingador Karatê do Rio Kwai; La tigre venuta dal fiume Kwai* - Okay, so what we have here is an interesting anomaly among the small off shoot of the Spaghetti Western sub-genre known as "Kung Fu Spaghetti Western Movies". In this case, the hero is neither Japanese (a la Robin Hood, Arrows, Beans and Karate) or Chinese (although there is a Chinese character here), but is Thai. As a result, the expected Western brawls come peppered with a dash of muay thai. I can only guess that movies like *The Tournament* and *Duel of Fists* had been fairly successful in Europe for director Franco Lattanzi to try to shake up the formula with this ethnic substitution. Sadly, the fact that you have Thai martial artist in the lead role turns out to be the only memorable thing in this movie.

Somewhere in Thailand circa 1870, a Thai man whose name we'll never actually learn (whom we'll call Tiger and is played by Krung Srivilai of *Cobra Thunderbolt*) is seeking permission from some monks at the local Buddhist temple (from the architecture, I wonder if the film crew actually went to Thailand to film these scenes) to go to the United States. Apparently there was an American guy named Richard Stone who was living in Thailand and had acquired a jewel-encrusted elephant before dying. The movie never explains why he was in Thailand, how he acquired the elephant or how he died. Tiger know Stone and thus has taken it upon himself to return the Stone's ashes to his family and give them the elephant.

Tiger isn't the only one who knows about the jewels, though. There's a vicious, cutthroat gang of bandits led by Jack Mason (Gordon Mitchell, of *Atlas in the Land of the Cyclops*) who have found out about it. They try to ambush him on his way to the town of Abilene, where the Stone family lives. However, being white people from the 1800s (and I'm sure many people of today would also fall into this group), they think that all Asians are the same and end up harassing the local Chinaman, Won Lon (Kam Wong Lung). Won Lon is a real piece of work: He's the embodiment of almost every Chinese stereotype one might imagine: he's proficient in kung fu, he speaks in parables (complete with the familiar 'So Sorry' accent), he owns a Chinese restaurant, his wife (surprisingly a white woman, which I doubt would've been allowed in 1870s Texas) is treated in a pseudo-subservient manner, and he knows how to perform acupuncture. All that's missing is for him to be running a Laundromat on the side!

Anyway, Tiger shows up and fights with the bandits, but gets bashed in the leg for his troubles. The bandits flee and make it to the Stone homestead, where they proceed to murder Richard's widow, his father and his little daughter

Mary in cold blood. This is witnessed by some random cowboy named James, who will be the hero's ally for the rest of the movie. Meanwhile, Tiger limps into town where he's taken in by the local floozy (Lina Franchi—we know she's playing a floozy because she's the only female character whose dress lets us see her cleavage), who takes a single look at him and decide that she'd like nothing more than to taste some Thai cuisine. Their amorous encounter is interrupted by the arrival of Sheriff Sam (George Eastman), who's looking for the "Thailandese" (the characters call Tiger the "Thailandese", although in the 1800s, wouldn't he be called the Siamese?). Tiger makes a break for it and eventually makes it to the Stone place. Jeff Mason and his gang are ready: they have one of their men and Mason's gal act like the Stone's, although Tiger figures it out in time. He escapes, but is shot in the shoulder and almost succumbs to his wounds.

\*Almost\* is the key word here, as he's rescued by Won Lon, who nurses him back to health via acupuncture and bullet-removal surgery (the Chinese guy can do everything!!!). But Jack Mason strikes back by kidnapping Won Lon's wife and demanding an exchange: Tiger for her. Tiger and the wife are able to escape unscathed, so the bad guys finally decide that they're through screwing around and start taking hostages in order to get their hands on the elephant. Perhaps they could've remade this as *Tom Yung Goong 2*, in which Tony Jaa's jeweled elephant could've gotten stolen, so he'd tear a\*\* through the Wild West, beating people up as while screaming, "Where's my elephant!!!"

So the film isn't very good. It is extremely cheap and the sets are especially threadbare. You almost get the feeling that they were working with the leftovers of sets that had been used in 15 different Spaghetti Westerns prior to filming. That shouldn't be too much of a problem, as *Django* used shambling western buildings to great atmospheric effect. That could also have been the case here, especially considering how cold-blooded the villains are. But the lack of action and suspense, coupled with the horrible 70s muzak (although note how the notorious Oriental music riff is played whenever Won Lon is onscreen) that makes up 95% of the film's score, robs the film of any sort of real emotion.

The fight scenes aren't very frequent. Won Lon doesn't actually fight until the end, when he dishes out the kung fu to two of Jack Mason's stooges. He actually kicks better than Krug Srivilai. Srivilai, I'm assuming, is a muay thai fighter and you can see that (to some extent) in the fight. He does a lot of knee strikes and some clinching, plus a lot of roundhouse kicks that aim high, but still look kind of sloppy. It's like he's performing a roundhouse kick, but instead of driving the ball of his foot into his opponent, he hits the guy with the lower region of his shin. His handwork is nondescript brawling punches. It's pretty much on the level of an early Jimmy Wang Yu film as far as I'm concerned. Won Lon is far crisper in his moves, both his kicks and hits, but his scene is really short. In the other fights, he just throws acupuncture needles like darts as a sort of precursor to Jet Li's character from *Kiss of the Dragon*.

In the end, the film is mostly memorable for its rampant illogic, which follows all the way through to the asinine finale that hinges upon the unexpected survival of a character whom we saw die earlier. If I had cared more, I would've rewound the film to see if I had missed someone. Alas, I didn't.

**Tiger Over Wall (Hong Kong, 1980: Lu Chin-ku)** - I am quite behind many in watching independent Hong Kong martial art films that I thought it was time to watch one that I have seen mentioned many times on this site. Overall this is not a good film. You can tell it was rushed with some characters appearing than never appearing again (dyed *gwailo* appearing with I think mother and father.) It starts off with a "Warning Chinese and Dogs Not Allowed" sign (reference to *Fist of Fury* aka *The Chinese Connection*, yet apparently Chinese and dogs are allowed since the main resident (Glen Thomson) has a Chinese wife who has a dog. Plus there are plenty of Chinese playing behind that sign. Actually it is best not to think logically about this one because some of the character's behaviors, horrible English dubbing, and plot thread disappearances will drive you a little batty. I think most people who rewatch this ignore the exposition and just go to the two main fight scenes which are the high points of the film. Or they judge the film solely based on the finale -- "It's the most important part of the story, the ending." I have no issue with the main plot though with the disappearance of a dog being the impetus to start all the action (see John Wick or *Seven Psychopaths* for other good films dealing with a dog being the cause of it all.) But I can see viewers with the problems I mentioned above wanting to turn it off at the halfway point. That would be a mistake for martial art fans.

The Chiang Tao/Phillip Ko fight scene is underrated, but that is because the best scene in the movie is the final fight and this one is a bit too short. I liked the use of the umbrellas.

The last fight is awesome and understandably well liked among the martial art film fan illuminati. I do agree that it picks up (in *Spinal Tap* talk it goes to 11) once the weapons have been dropped, but still Phillip Ko with the staff and Hwang Jang-lee with the *guan dao*. I may be in the minority, but after watching this several times I think Hwang



outperforms Ko with the weapon as well as mix in kicks while wielding the *guan dao*. He does more of a variety of movement while Ko seems too typical (while still being good) with his staff. But the fight scene shines most when they get down to hand-to-foot fighting. Hwang is awesome and one of my favorite on screen fights as his kicks are fluid, he can use punches to good effect and he works combinations (the key for great fight scenes) effortlessly with multiple spinning heel kicks (or spinning heel kick to roundhouse to spinning heel kick to roundhouse and repeat) and works well against the hybrid mantis form of Ko.

Random thoughts: Chan Lau as the village idiot makes me miss Dean Shek. Do you ever think about combinations of actors like what would Dean Shek (in his prime) have been like with Pauly Shore? Imagine a road movie starring those two. The biting scene reminded me of a similar scene in *Beach of the War Gods*. As mentioned by others: what the hell was with Hwang Jang-lee's dubbing voice. I felt bad for Hwang as it undercuts his character by sounding like a smoking castrato who is accidentally taking estrogen therapy instead of testosterone. Is there a Cantonese version of this available for this Hong Kong film?

**Tiger Tiger Tiger (Taiwan, 1973: Fu Ching-Wa)** - This was action director Yen Yu-Lung's fifth and penultimate film, and the last movie he choreographed during the 1970s. He demonstrates here how much grew as a fight choreographer since 1971, as he gives us some of the best basher and booting action of an early 70s movie outside of a Bruce Leung film. The plot deals with a couple of martial artists (Si Wai and actress Gwok Siu-Chong) fighting a trio of jean-wearing kung fu bikers (including a young Blackie Ko) who are terrorizing the populace. Doris Lung shows up as the main villain's daughter, but she doesn't get to fight until the last five minutes or so. There is a lot of kicking on display here, which is quite good for the time period. The fights are long and brutal, with each character taking a licking that could kill a person three times over before dying. I thought it was cool that one of the bikers pulls out a chain whip at one point. Anyway, the action is extremely satisfying and I lamented that Yen Yu-Lung didn't go on to bigger, better things.

**Tiger VS Dragon (Hong Kong, 1972: Ng See-Yuen) - a.k.a Kung Fu The Invisible Fist/ The Good & The Bad** - Karate master Captain Jai Tai a.k.a Hungry Tiger (Kurata) is a Japanese soldier given the task of going to mainland China as a spy. His mission is to get vital information in preparation for the Japanese invasion of China. He joins up with some traitorous Chinese slave traders led by Ling San Tai (Chaing Nan). They run the docks in Shanghai and don't mind helping Captain Tai with his mission. Meanwhile the Chinese government sends Captain Li Chang a.k.a Crazy Dragon (Chan Sing) to Shanghai to deal with the slave traders. Little does Chang know that he's dealing with a much bigger problem in the form of a possible Japanese invasion.

This is not your usual Chinese VS Japanese film and for a movie of this kind it's not the most offensive. Saying that the Japanese are portrayed as utterly evil with our hero Captain Chang out to stop them at any cost. Chan Sing's character is a bit like Popeye Doyle in *The French Connection*. Once he's exposes Kurata's evil plan and the slave trading accomplices he'll absolutely not stop until they're brought to justice. The stories better than average, there's many supporting characters who help both sides along the way. Sorry if I overlook these roles but I've tried to keep my focus on this month theme rather than covering the entire cast, plot, soundtrack etc.

Going back to what I said about this not been the usual Chinese VS Japanese exploitation fest. One of the main reasons I say this because Karate is portrayed quite respectfully in the film. When Captain Tai arrives in Shanghai we see the local crime lords son played by none other than Chan Wai Man, beating up a few unruly dock workers. He then gets talking to Captain Tai and reveals he wants to learn Karate because he's heard it's so powerful and effective. Normally you would get the usual Kung Fu is much superior to Karate spiel, but not in this case. You do get the odd negative comment to each style but it's not overly emphasised which is refreshing.

The fight choreography is handled by Bruce Leung, Tommy Lee & Lee Ka Ting. That's an impressive team and it shows in the film's fight scenes. The style is a mix of basher and some shapes with acrobatics thrown in. We also get the usual dose of super human feats put into the mix too. For anyone that's watched a lot of films from this era you know what to expect. Weapons fans might be left disappointed but we do get treated to some Sai and Tonfa displays in the finale. Bruce Leung also gets a small cameo at the start of the film playing a Chinese soldier. He only gets a brief fight which isn't enough to show off his great skills.

The choreographers portray Karate in a stiff regimental kind of way. Yet they still manage to give you the impression it's a very strong, powerful & effective style. This is made very clear at the start of the film where the film's villain shows off his skills. Kung Fu on the other hand appears to be more organic and less robotic when used in the fight scenes. I have to say the Karate used looks very economic with use of short sharp kicks and strikes. There are only

two Karate experts in the film and that's Kurata's character & his knife wielding bodyguard. It's as if Captain Tai and his sidekick have no intention of using any more energy than they have to. This certainly wouldn't be the case if they were performing more elaborate and flowery movements.

Now let's take a look at the epic almost thirty minute finale that really deserves a review all its own. Captain Chang finally catches up with the wrong doing Japanese and goes head to head in a brutal fight come chase scene. It's as much a chase scene as a fight because it takes in so many locations. There's some great use of the settings as the two top fighters engage in a fight to the death. You really get the impression both men are desperate to survive. The action reaches some docks where it comes to a climax. After beating each other senseless with empty hands, Kurata pulls out a pair of tonfa sticks. Luckily Chan Sing's done his homework and whips out a pair of Sai to counter the deadly tonfa. There are other characters involved in the finale and it's not just focused on the two leads. I just don't have enough time to cover every part of this one truly mental showdown. Again Kurata's Karate appears to be an equal match for Chan Sing's wild Kung Fu with some tiger style thrown in. You get the impression it's not who's got the best fighting style in this one on one encounter. There's just a feeling that it's only the most determined man who wins in the end.

Perhaps Chan Sing's real life involvement in Karate had something to do with the style not being portrayed so negatively?. He was a Goju-Ryu & Gju Kai Karate instructor. He also worked as a Hong Kong prison policeman which shows he wasn't just an onscreen tough guy. Yusuaki Kurata is a real life martial artist who could clearly handle himself off screen too. Here's a brief look at his Martial Arts C.V Karate (7th degree) Judo (3rd degree) & Aikido (2nd degree). He's also the chief advisor to the All Japan Nunchaku League. By the time you get to the end of this film you will almost feel as worn out as the two fighters themselves. The two combatants really live up their respective names of Hungry Tiger and Crazy Dragon after this ultimate showdown.

If you are fan of the cast then I'm sure you will find this film as entertaining as I did. The film does have its faults and some parts of the story don't really get explained properly. The slave trading operation for example just vanishes from the film. Irene Ryder gets little to do as the love interest. I haven't seen her in any other films apart from this one. She was a pop singer in HK during the 60's & collaborated once with Robert Lee. I'd like to make a brief mention of actor Hon Gwok Choi who's presence I've overlooked. He performs some nice move's in particular an impressive somersault that turns into a flying kick. Overall this is not the greatest Martial Arts film ever made but it's pretty good example of early 1970's independent action cinema.

**Tigress is Coming (Taiwan, 1968: Wu Pang)** - Ting Ying and her young sister arrive in a town with a man who has asked them to help a family, but they are caught in a fight with Au Wei's men because they stopped a martial arts street performance, believing that a young girl was about to be killed by her partners.

During the fight, the man they call "uncle" is kidnapped and when they try to let him free, they are caught too, but Ting Ying is so fierce and strong that she succeeds in breaking the wall of the prison and they escape.

They arrive in an inn and the owner gives them a room in which a swordsman arrives, telling that it's his room. As the two girls are disguised as men, the three of them spend the night in the same room (after a mini fight), but the man (Liu Ping) has doubts and thinks that the elder "man" is a girl.

Later, he arrives at Au Wei's mansion and this latter accepts him as one of his men. Then, Ting Ying, "uncle" and the little girl (Xiao Huei, if I heard well) arrive at the house of the family they are supposed to help and we discover that Ting Ying is the perfect doppelganger of the daughter of the family, who is supposed to be married to Au Wei. As the movie is in Mandarin, I didn't understand what was the plan of the parents and "uncle", but both Ting Ying 1 and Ting Ying 2 go to Au Wei's house, together with "uncle" disguised as a woman matchmaker and when Au Wei wants to sleep with his wife, Ting Ying fights with him and his men, helped by a masked man who is nobody else than Liu Ping and finally they all escape, except Ting Ying (the fighter), who is trapped in a cave and drugged by several gas.

Liu Ping and Xiao Huei return to Au Wei's house in order to help her and while Liu Ping fights with Au Wei, the two girls escape and the three of them return to Ting Ying's (the bride) house, only to discover that the mother is hurt, the father has been kidnapped and I didn't understand what happened to "uncle" and Ting Ying the bride.

Liu Ping, Ting Ying and Xiao Huei go to the forest and discover the father hanged on a pole and they finally succeed in saving him, after a big fight with Au Wei who almost kills Liu Ping, but it's thanks to Ting Ying's intelligence and Xiao Huei's ability with her axe that they finally kill him, and Liu Ping reveals that he is the son of a man who has been killed by Au Wei years ago. Ting Ying's "bride" family is finally reunited and the two sisters return to their

forest, followed by Liu Ping who is in love with Ting Ying the fighter.

Good movie, with good fights and some very funny moments. Since Ting Ying and Ng Siu Wai play sisters and wear the same clothes as in Flying sword girl, and also fight with the same weapons, I wonder if this movie is a sequel or a prequel of Flying sword girl, which I watched at least a year ago (which explains that I don't remember if there is a connection between the two movies or if they are independent ones with the same characters...). Does anyone have an idea regarding this matter ?

**Tigresses (South Korea, 1977: Lee Hyeuk-Su) - aka Black Mark of Shaolin; Heuk-pyo of Shaolin Temple** - In one province, a young woman kills the henchmen of the one who reigns over the village. This revenge dates from his childhood. She was separated from her sister and her parents were murdered by a man who wanted to take the place of father of the two daughters. She will face several guards of this leader, until this one allies with another young woman as talented as ...

An very predictable old movie. Obviously the second woman is the sister of the first. We think of Ninja Scroll, the heroine facing different guards each having special powers. The picture is ugly and very poor quality, juggling with the backlighting and the night sequences (so we do not see much). The fights are fun and each have small finds (storm of leaves, mouth flamethrower). In the story we find elements that are often used, such as the two separated children, each with half a medallion. Humor dominates, especially during a fight against a black man. He is hit several times in the face and, as his opponent stops, continues to move his head as if he was still receiving other shots. Always in the same fight,

The final battle in the snowy plain is the best scene in the film. The fight itself is superior to the others, allows itself a little gory moment, and above all suddenly makes the villain a little more human. This one is absolutely not size against the heroine and to see him receiving innumerable blows to the slow one whereas he is incapable to continue to fight not to appear disloyal. The heroine loses her status for a moment, leaving her character only as a hateful being, completing her opponent without flinching. This scene concludes the film, not without show us the two sisters finally gathered hugging, unaware of the fate of the old penguin who helped one of her, then killed by one of the guards of the chief.

**To Crack the Dragon Gate (Hong Kong, 1970: Fung Chi-Kong, Ng Wui) – aka One Arm Against Dragon Door; The One Who Broke Down the Dragon Party** - Siao Fong Fong and Fung Bo Bo's family are escorted by Kenneth Tsang, his father and some men. They are attacked by some bandits and, before fighting, Fung Bo Bo's father hide something in her medallion and asks Kenneth Tsang to take her away. During the battle, Kenneth Tsang's father, the whole Siao Fong Fong's family and all the men are killed and one of the bandits cuts Siao Fong Fong's left hand. She is saved by an old man and Kenneth Tsang leaves with her and takes refuge in an inn where there are some men who are plotting against the chief of the bandits.

During the battle, Fung Bo Bo falls from the mountain and becomes amnesic. She discovers a woman in the forest and this one takes her to her home. We discover later that it's the chief of the bandits' home and there, Fung Bo Bo learns to fight. Siao Fong Fong, Kenneth Tsang and their allies fight against the bandits and try to find a solution to be able to go in the chief of the bandits' house. They ask an old nun for her help. She has a left hand skill which makes her stronger than anyone and, in order to help Siao Fong Fong, she cuts her own left hand to give it to Siao Fong Fong (!!) and she gives her a martial arts book in order that she learns how to use her hand.

Siao Fong Fong and her friends go to the chief of bandits' house and they fight ; Fung Bo Bo still doesn't recognize her sister and the woman who has found her in the forest and has found once the secret document in her medallion gives her a strike and she recovers her memory and fights with her sister. That's a very good movie, with interesting fights and story.

**To Kill A Jaguar (Hong Kong, 1977: Hua Shan)** - A young woman (Bobo), searching for her father in the city of Shanghai, stumbles across a fight between rival gangs and as a consequence is reunited with a childhood friend (Silly Boy/ Jaguar). Reminiscences of their childhood experiences, shared together with another boy (He Lie),

provide the viewer with a background which will become very relevant to events later in the film. Starring Nora Miao (Bobo), Chung Wah (Jaguar), and Lau Wing (He Lie).

I must admit that Gangster films are not my favourite genre. Western interpretations can be very sombre affairs, and women can often be portrayed and treated very poorly. However, I have enjoyed Hua Shan's wuxia/horror films in the past, so I was interested to see how a Shaw Brothers director would interpret the subject. What I found was an action film broadly in keeping with preconceived expectations, but balanced by a love story with plenty of emotional impact.

After the opening described above, the film reverts to type as we follow Jaguar through the typical gangster rivalries and double-crosses as various characters jostle for dominance. The biggest threat seems to come from within, despite concerns about the activities of a rival gang. Close attention is required of the viewer to follow the rapidly shifting loyalties of the characters; the complexity of the plot.

But Jaguar's motivations are more complex than a simple desire for power. Revenge is also a factor. But at their heart is unrequited love, and the complex triangle that has existed between two men and one woman since childhood. This is brought into stark relief with the return of Jaguar's other childhood friend, He Lie, later in the film. This triangle is further complicated by a second woman, more recent to Jaguar's past, who remains a source of tension between Jaguar and his boss for a very understandable reason. Overall, I think this scenario would have made Chang Cheh very proud!

The director places much emphasis on the fights and the inherent instability of the lifestyle, yet there is also a strong emotional content which gives a humanity to the three main characters and maintains the viewers interest throughout the duration of the film.

**To Kill a Mastermind (Hong Kong, 1979: Sun Chung)** - After my second time watching this, I still feel the same way. A potentially very good Sun Chung film undermined by surprisingly poor casting, fights, script and too many visual callbacks to other SC and Chang Cheh films. Like I've said elsewhere, if I cannot get behind a character or two early in, I struggle through the film. I was particularly surprised I just didn't care because so many of Sun Chung's films are filled with excellent and complex characterizations.

Briefly, Lord Yang wants to eradicate the criminal Quisha organization once and for all. He plants several spies within the society and their plan of undoing Quisha through discord and paranoia starts to work. Who is the Chief above all Chiefs in Quisha and how can we take this fellow and his ruthless bunch out.

A big problem is the miscast of the Chief Mastermind (along with just about everyone else), but I won't blow it for anyone who hasn't seen this film. The chief mastermind actor has delivered many a fine bad guy turns before but not here. Ku Feng, Chan Wai Man, Pia Paio or Ti Lung would have been much better in that part (I think Ti would have been inspired casting in this role actually.)

Better casting, more intense fight choreography, unique make up concepts and a tighter script would make this another entertaining Sun Chung wuxia. I respect that Sun was trying to introduce new actors into his stable of wuxia performers, but to make a story about a criminal organization work, compelling characters and actors are needed.

**To Kill with Intrigue (Hong Kong/South Korea, 1977: Lo Wei, Kim Jin-Tae)** - Here I go diving into what seems to be regarded as the bottom of the barrel when it comes to Jackie's classic era films..

The dark wuxia/clan feud story was very solid, and I found myself pretty engaged in it, and genuinely interested/caring about what happens to the characters. It was scripted by Ku Long, so that gives you a good idea of what to expect. The acting was good for the most part, particularly Jackie.. Seeing Jackie all "wuxia'd" up was cool, and he handled the serious/dark role very well.. Good acting from him, and he didn't overact. Yu Ling-Lung was a bit annoying as the confused girlfriend, she sulked a little too much - but it was understandable given the situation of the film, so I give it a pass. The atmosphere of the movie was very dark to match the story, with some beautiful yet dark locations.

I found the action of the film to be solid overall, if nothing great, and a bit repetitive/silly on a few occasions. When the action was kept on the ground, it was good though, with a mix of hand to hand and weapons work. It was a little slow, but you could still see glimpses of Jackie's talent, and you can add Sin Il-Ryong to the list of fantastic Korean kickers who weren't in enough movies.. HKMDB has this guy listed for 3 films, and I feel like it's worth seeing everyone just for him! He was also a decent actor, but his kicks were on point. Some scenes (particularly the end) had too much unnecessary leaping/wirework, but I'd say there was more grounded fighting than that.. there were also some cheesy moments that I enjoyed, IE. Jackie throwing a sword at a guy, knocking him out of a window, pushing him back 20 feet or so in mid-air, and pinning him to a tree! Yeah!

The costumes overall were decent and your typical wuxia regalia.. Yeah they may not have been as nice as what Chor Yuen was working with but they were decent for the most part.. With that said, there were some that were utterly ridiculous, such as the flower-head-masks the evil "Killer Bee clan" donned! Even those, I enjoyed them, even if only for camp value, lol. The dub ranged from pretty good/serious, to very poor. I didn't hear any unintentionally funny stuff I can think of, when it was bad it was just bad... But I found it to be more good than bad.

I can see how some may be put off by the overly dark, melodramatic story, inconsistent choreography, and some silly costume/prop choices and effects.. Even with those flaws though, I can't see how this movie is deserving of scores like "2/10".. Really, I just can't see how this flick is considered so bad.. It has a better, easier to follow story than many similar flicks, and a good/different performance from Jackie. I would venture to say I like it more than SOME Chor Yuen movie's I have seen, although it is nowhere near my favorite Chor Yuen flicks. I without a doubt enjoyed it much more than Shaolin Wooden Men, which seems to be pretty well received. It's no Young Master or SITES, but it is a damn enjoyable movie to me, and I wouldn't recommend any fan miss the chance to see Jackie Chan in a pure wuxia flick.

**Tornado of Pearl River (Hong Kong, 1974: Wong Sing Loy)** - If you've seen 'The Big Boss' (and who hasn't) then you'll be very familiar with the plot of this film. It's basically the same story transferred to 'turn of the century' China; a time when the country was overrun by foreign powers looking to make a quick buck in China.

Tan Tao Liang arrives at the docks (not sure where) and finds the workers being seriously harassed by their Chinese gangmasters. The place is practically in uproar and Tan jumps into the thick of things with some amazing kicks. As in the Bruce Lee film, the hero is wooed by the villains, being promoted to a position of power, while they continue with their illegal drug smuggling trade. When he eventually realises what a mug he's been, Tan storms the big boss's mansion.

Ok, by plotting and acting standards this is not going to win any awards but is notable in being a much larger production than the original 'Big Boss' with a considerable number of extras and impressive locations. Tan Tao Liang delivers a superb kicking performance, possibly the best of his career, which sees him throw all manner of combinations. There's one particular scene (featured in the documentary 'Top Fighter') which sees him repeatedly kick at different heights without once putting his foot down. According to an interview this was a technique he perfected especially for tournament fighting. There's a riot going on at the docks and Tan Tao Liang's character makes his first appearance in the film with an amazing display of kicks. The spinning and jumping kicks are all pretty amazing but there's a beautiful sequence where he repeatedly alternates between kicking a guy in the stomach and head, while moving forwards and without once putting his foot down. It's a beautiful display of tournament style kicking that's sadly over too quickly.

The style of choreography definitely belongs to the 'basher' category coming from the early seventies and with little skill being displayed on the part of the villains. The head baddy is particularly unconvincing but fight scenes are still effective due to the large number of opponents that Tan faces at any one time. Worth seeing for the superb display from the leading actor.

**Touch Of Zen, A (Taiwan, 1971: King Hu)** - Noblewoman Yang Hiu-Ching(Hsu Feng) has been driven from her town & relentlessly pursued by the evil eunuch Ouyang Nin(Roc Tien). She hides in a small frontier town where she gets help from a mysterious group of monks, a scholar and his mother.

King Hu's two part three hour plus Wu Xia epic remains a visually striking and atmospheric piece of film making. This hugely influential Taiwanese movie puts a big emphasis on character and story. The narrative isn't there to just

showcase the physical skills of the actors involved. This production is certainly not about packing as many fights into the run time as possible. The plot is based loosely on a short story by Pu Song Ling called *The Magnanimous Girl*. If you read the story you can see the influence it had on some parts of the movie. The production was just as epic as the story it was about. Hu filmed the movie between 1968 and 1971, releasing it in two parts in Taiwan. He then later released the two parts as one feature length movie in Hong Kong.

The first thing that strikes me about any King Hu movie is his visual flair. That comes as no surprise when you consider he was a former art student at a prestigious Beijing art school. From the opening scenes of *A Touch Of Zen*, you can see Hu's flair and artistic vision hit you full on. The way he films the shots of the mist clad ruined fort during some of the opening scenes, is just one good example of this visual style. I should also mention the excellent cinematography by Hua Hui-Ying. His work really compliments Hu's style and he captures the stunning Taiwanese waterfalls, deserts and woodland settings perfectly. The two had worked together on *Dragon Gate Inn*, but I feel this movie is a far better showcase for Ying and Hu's visual talents. Yang Hui-Ching & General Shih's (Pai Ying) encounter with Commander Chen (Han Ying Chieh) in the forest, is a superb example of the how both Ying and Hu work so well together. There's some great use of the natural light as it pierces through the floating mist in the forest. There's not that many films that give you the impression your watching a lesson in master filmmaking rather than just another fictional story. When I watch a film like this it makes me think if modern filmmakers is evolving or going backwards?.

The stylishly staged & fitting action scenes were choreographed by the team of Han Ying Chieh (Come Drink With Me) & Poon Yiu-Kwan (Deadly Duo). I'm not very familiar with the work of Yiu-Kwan but Han Ying Chieh's influence is easier to spot. He has a certain rhythm to his fights that's unique to him. You can see similar elements in these fights to the one's he staged for *Come Drink With Me* & *Fist Of Fury*. There are some empty handed displays but the fights are more about the swordplay. Hsu Feng looks more than capable at handling a blade with Chieh & Kwan doing a good job of making all the casts members look the part. Roc Tiens onscreen fighting skills look decent as always. Here he does an amazing job of playing one of the films nastiest villains Ouyang Nin. This is one of the first movies of his I've watched where he prefers to use a sword rather than his hands for settling scores. The quality of the fights is pretty consistent throughout the picture. The encounters that conclude parts 1 & 2 of the movie, being the highlights for me. One of them featuring a very early role from Sammo Hung as one of Commander Chens bodyguards. The action doesn't really turn up until the story is well established. Which is a good thing in the case of *A Touch Of Zen*. However some fans might not enjoy the older and slower 1960's approach to screen combat.

There's so many superb performances and characters in this film its hard choosing which I should highlight. To look at each one individually I'd have turn this review into more of an essay. Hsu Feng (Chase Step By Step) is on top form as the reserved but deadly Yang Hui-Ching. She's the real star of the film and its easy to see why she got so much regular work as an actress. Hsu has a great way of portraying strong capable female roles like the one she portrays here. Her strong willed character reminded me a little of Michell Yeoh's role in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. Both try to avoid revealing their true feelings by putting on a stern face that reveals little of how they feel emotionally to the world. Id also like to mention another standout performance. That of Roy Chiao (The Killer In White) as the good-natured but tough Abbott Hui Yuan. One of the nicest and most memorable characters in the film. This amazing role is superb example and testament to the man's acting skills. Chiao's convincing performance really adds a lot to the overall impact of the film. Despite only having a supporting role he really leaves a big impression.

Shih Chun puts in a very nice acting display as the scholar and artist Mr Ku. Chun does a fine job of bringing the naive but honest scholar to life. Ku's character and name have been taken from the short story *The Magnanimous Girl*. His mother in the *A Touch Of Zen* is also clearly taken from that story too. The same can be said for Hsu Fengs character who the mother (Chang Pin-Yu) tries to pair up with Ku. I felt the short story really had the strongest influence over the first hour or so of the movie. Getting back to the actors Chang Pin-Yu gives one of the standout performances as Ku's nagging mother. She feels Ku should be married and more career driven and reminds him at every chance she gets. This is another nod to use of some elements from *The Magnanimous Girl*. Some fans might recognize Pin-Yu as the female monk who teaches Jackie Chan a thing or two about Kung Fu in *Shaolin Wooden Men*. Here her role is strictly dramatic with no displays of Martial Arts at all.

One thing that really stood out to me as I watched this movie was the soundtrack. There are some nods to Ennio Morricone as you might expect with the visual style having some inspiration from the Sergio Leone style. The music was not really to my taste and some of it I found a little grating. That said the score by Lon Ming-Tao & Wu Da-Jiang really does suit the movie and I can't imagine the film without it. Even if the music isn't to my taste it's nice to see an older Asian production that has such an original and extensive soundtrack. The set design by Chow Chi-Leung deserves a mention also. He created some superb backdrops for the drama and action to take place. The ruined fort featured in the first half of the film really impressed me with the design and attention to detail. King Hu also worked as one of the productions three art directors too but I can't say how much influence he had on the set's?. Hu really made use of the many skills he picked up early in his career. During his time at Shaw Brothers he would work in

many roles from script writer and set decorator to assistant director and actor. It really paid off when you look at the credits and see how much he contributed to this ground breaking production.

This epic beautifully captured tale made by the Union Film/International Film Production companies is a unique experience. To be honest I'm not the worlds biggest fan of the Wu Xia genre. That said I can still appreciate and enjoy some of the films from that genre. A Touch Of Zen is not your ordinary mythical chinese Wu Xia adventure. Its just not really your average movie experience either and that's a good thing. Overall this is a film that all die hard Asian film enthusiasts should watch at least once. If you are looking for fast hard hitting plentiful action then you should give this one a miss.

**Tormentor, The (Taiwan, 1973: Sun Ting-Mei)** - Because he argued with his father about his sister's marriage with Lung Fei, Chang Yi has been chased from his house and he works in a gold mine, where he befriends the boss' daughter.

There, he discovers that one of the boss' man, Shan Mao, bullies the honest workers and robs some gold under a bandit's orders. When Shan Mao kills Chang Yi's friend, he kills Shan Mao who tried to kill him by traitorous method after having given him a letter from his family, in which he learns that his father is dead.

Tung Li plays Chang Yi's brother ; when he discovers that his father is dead, he becomes suspicious on his father's brother-in-law (Suen Yuet in one of his usual villains role). Suen Yuet tells him that he is innocent, but we discover later that actually, it's him who murdered Chang Yi's father, under Lung Fei's orders, with whom he planned to rob Chang Yi's father's treasure.

Once again, here is another excellent punch and block Chang Yi's movie, in which he is excellent. Watch it with confidence.

**Toughest Guy, The (Taiwan, 1970: Liang Che-Fu, Ho Wai-Hong)** - 5 Japanese spies are sent to a Chinese town but I didn't understand what was the purpose of their mission (it seems that maybe there were cut scenes, because sometimes, the screen turned black and there were some unexplained things in the plot during the movie). Peter Yang Kwan and Ma Kei are Chinese spies, who must discover who is the traitor among the Chinese spies (from what I understood), and Li Lihua is a Chinese officer who has the same purpose, if I understood well.

After a lot of twists, fights, gunfights, treacheries, it appears that the mastermind was Ma Kei, and the Chinese finally get rid of the Japanese. Kong Do has a few scenes as one of Li Lihua's men. Good movie, but the lack of subtitles didn't help to fully understand the plot, and I enjoyed this movie a little but less than Liufu tea house. Yang Kwan, Ma Kei and Li Lihua are good in this movie.

**Tournament, The (Hong Kong, 1974: Huang Feng)** - Lau Siu-fung (Angela Mao Ying) is the daughter of a disgraced martial arts instructor who had just committed suicide. He had brought two students to fight in Thai boxing matches that had lost quite badly (one dying) and was subsequently ostracized. She needs to bring honor back to her father and Chinese Kung Fu as well by beating the Thai at their own game all while accepting that there is some weakness to their currently practiced style. The "tournament" Muay Thai fighting scenes are unfortunately undercranked too much. It does not help that putting professional Thai fighters also makes their opponents really look out-of-place especially with Carter Wong – though he looks fine outside of the ring. The fight scenes outside of the ring are solid with Sammo Hung and Chan Chuen once again choreographing a Wong Fung (*Hapkido*) directed film. The confrontation between Mao Ying and Whang In-shik (always a plus) is a highlight along with the other non-tournament fight scenes in an otherwise lackluster and sometimes inane plot.

- I love when the crowds are just gathering around to watch a movie being made.
- Hmmm, there is no tournament in this film.
- There is some on location footage in Thailand most notably the Ayutthaya temple.
- Is that Yuen Biao in drag? Of course it is. Check how many times you can spot him (he seems to get around to different countries as well.)
- Just like with When Taekwondo Strikes there is an almost out-of-place nude scene. It almost feels like the director had to have one (not uncommon, I believe Martin Scorsese had to have nudity in Mean Streets.)

This leads to a funny continuity error when the ripped shirt miraculously appears in its pristine condition later on.

- While seeing women versus men in martial art films does not strike me as abnormal, it feels a bit weird to me seeing it in a "ring setting." It reminded me of a similar scene in Muay Thai Giant (aka Somtum) though that girl was quite young.
- Hilarious to hear the sound cue from Richard Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra (most famous for its use in 2001: A Space Odyssey; the sound cue is from that film.)
- Mao Ying has some great kicks especially when she combines crescent kicks with a spinning heel kick (though seriously when Whang In-shik incorporates it in his repertoire it is a thing of beauty.)
- George Yirikian: You get to see a rare case of a karate expert actually performing karate.
- No idea who the Thai champions are (I have their names from the trailer which is the same on HKMDB, but still no idea.)
- IMDB has ELO's In Old England Town as a sound cue. Currently have not been able to match up. But since I have now heard the song several times I think I might be able to figure if it is in there or not (unless somewhere here knows.)

**Triumph of Two Kung Fu Arts (Taiwan, 1977: Chung Ching-Wun)** - Odd attempt at a kung fu family drama weepie, which doesn't lend itself well to a clunky dub. It's trying very hard to be sincere but mostly comes across as slow and sluggish. The fighting isn't especially effective, and in the dub some joker decided to give villain Kam Kong a weird cat-like cry which just makes the fights all the more irritating. Chan Wei Man is an effective presence as a tortured lead, but overall this one is a bit of a bore. The endlessly repeated ballad on the soundtrack is nice first time around, but by its 40th appearance, you'll be groaning.

**Trail of the Broken Blade (Hong Kong, 1967: Chang Cheh)** - Wang Yu plays again a righteous guy who, after having killed his father's murderer, leaves his lover in order that she isn't victim of those who chase him, and ends in a small town where he takes care of the horses of the people who live in the inn. Chiao Chuang is a righteous Wu Dang's student who helps Wang Yu's lover family against bad people and learns about Wang Yu's story, and, though he has fallen for the girl (Chin Ping), he promises her that he will bring her lover back. Superb movie, with inventive weapons, secret passages, secret darts, and Wang Yu shows again his character of the righteous man who is so loyal that he prefers to give up his happiness in order that others can be happy.

**Traitorous, The (Taiwan, 1976: Sung Ting-Mei)** - Here's a beast we've seen before, with Carter Wong as a Shaolin student out to revenge the death of his parents at the hands of government forces. He's gotta carry water and jump out of mud pits properly before being let out on his killing spree though. Director Sung Ting-Mei uses agony, both ways, as fuel for his simple-minded story and while it's a gory choice, it's not THE gory choice. The Traitorous therefore plods along like most low-budget vehicles of its kind, disappointing also in the fight department as little invention exists (only the pyramid of guards is a fun, crazy concept). Swingy arms, punching and blocking as a dominating factor isn't a beneficiary for the production, especially not since Carter Wong is less than ideal in the lead. Polly Kuan displays some much needed fury though, in particular in her opening fight scene against multiple opponents. Chang Yi plays our white haired villain while Sammo Hung also appears as one of his henchmen.

**Treasure of Bruce Le (Hong Kong, 1979: Joseph Kong)** - After being impressed by the excitement and mayhem of Bruce Le's NINJA OVER THE GREAT WALL, I decided to give him another chance. He blew it...big time! I started watching this one a few weeks ago but gave up after about 40 minutes. Only after Keith's incessant nagging did I manage to finish it up.

The filmmakers employ standard martial arts plot #5 v. 2.0:

Good guy teacher has a book containing the Secret 5 kung fu styles.

Naturally, bad guys (Japanese, of course) want this book and kill teacher.

Teacher's students get pissed and seek revenge.

Bruce Le stars as Wong Chan Lung, the teacher's favorite pupil who finds out that fellow student Chow Yi Fah was behind their teacher's murder. Chow is secretly Japanese (he hid that pretty well) and wants the book in order to



help his people learn styles to defeat the Chinese. Of course, Chow also seemed jealous of Wong ("The teacher liked him. Used to give him special favors," he says. Whoa, what kinda special favors is he talking about?). Anyway, Chow defeats Wong initially but Wong goes to train with another teacher for a year (movie time: 5 minutes). He learns the Steel Finger technique by punch holes in fruit roughly the size of a human head. Hmmmmm, I wonder what he will do to Chow when they meet again?

This is pretty much the Bruce Le I remember. There are lots of fights but for some reason the film dragged on and on. It was roughly 75 minutes but felt like 75 years. Everything in this movie is so random. Some girl who lives in a hut leads the Japanese but she commits suicide literally the second Le confronts her. Bolo Yeung plays a special fighter brought in to combat Wong, but the two never fight. That pretty much sums up the movie right there. One guy gets his testicles ripped off but pops up in the very next scene sporting the same outfit and looking healthy. His wig falls off when he dies. Wong's second teacher also gets killed (Wong sure is bad luck) but not before taking out some guys with a move that crushes his opponent's bones (it sounds like someone ripping open a bag of M&Ms near the mike). Le manages to sneak in a few Bruce Lee wails during the final fight. Watching this makes me want to finish BRUCE LE'S GREATEST REVENGE even less. Thanks Keith!

**Triangular Duel (Taiwan, 1972: Joseph Kuo)** - Featuring the leading man and lady from Iron Man, Joseph Kuo taps into a gritty, furious side to martial arts action in Triangular Duel (and also in mentioned subsequent production). It's Iron Man that had the quality and quantity though but eventually Triangular Duel showcases a compelling hand. It's merely a lot lesser when being compared to high standards set by Kuo himself in the next movie and that's not a bad thing. Man Kong-Lung plays a rickshaw driver who's let into one of the local martial arts schools after some hesitation (he's quite a killing machine already). Getting caught up in a conflict between schools as his refuses a joint venture, he's also criticized for getting into fights, destroying the reputation of the school and it doesn't help he's fallen in love with a woman in one of the rival schools...

A basic frame story done with a hell of a lot less resources than Kuo's days making Wuxia's in the late 60s. While the likes of Iron Man and later The 7 Grandmasters survived its minute budget thanks to a constant stream of high quality action, this film is slow and executing its action with little to no impact for the longest of time. Add the fact that it's way longer than it should be, the extended finale does offer up the best action. There's nothing pretty here but only gritty and muddy (literally) brawls as Man Kong-Lung takes on the Iron Triangle of fighters and it shows Joseph Kuo's frame of mind, even when basic, made him rise above the independent competition.

**Trilogy of Swordmanship (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Cheh, Cheng Kang, Griffen Yueh)** - In 1st story arrogant son of magistrate wants to marry Shih Szu who obviously does not share his feelings....Good showcase for fans of SS who gets to do quite a lot fighting with spear.

Episode#2 is far more interesting when it comes to plot. Lily Ho is The Tigress on a mission to capture criminal (Lo Lieh, who agains gives excellent performance) using her "other qualities" than fighting. Twist ending made this feel rewarding watching experience.

#3 chang chehs ""White Water Strand" is thin on storyline, patriots are on a mission to save david chiang from being executed. Nothing you have not seen in full lenght movies of same tone but still enjoyable obviously with streets full of bodies in the end and spaghetti western style music fits well to image.

**True Game of Death (Taiwan, 1979: Chan San-Yat)** - In a change of pace, this is less a rip-off of Bruce Lee's GAME OF DEATH and is more a rip off of Robert Clouse's GAME OF DEATH. The film is a semi-bio of Bruce Lee, who is here is played by Lung Tien Tsing, the Spearman from FLAG OF IRON. Bruce Lee himself appears courtesy of the press conference footage for FIST OF UNICORN, and in an odd dream sequence where clips from WAY OF THE DRAGON are used. Linda Lee is here called April (O'Neil?), and a Betty Ting Pei lookalike is around, and the latter even gets to sing the real life favourite song of Bruce and Betty!

The fights are unremarkable, the Dan Inosanto clone is reasonable, Chi Hon Tsoi gets replaced with two fat blokes, and Kareem Abdul Jabbar becomes a boxer in a funny cape. Rubbish, but surprisingly enduring. Best part? The Bruce vs Dan Inosanto fight is scored with Lalo Schiffrin's version of the Jaws theme

**Trust and Brotherhood (Taiwan, 1972: Sun Yang)** - The villagers give their money to a kind old boss in order that he keeps it for them, but a lot of people is after the money ; among them, there are O Yau Man and a fighting girl, a prostitute and another boss played by Tien Yeh, who seems to be the kind boss' friend. The kind boss sends one of his men, Yee Yuen, to another town for some reason, but he is killed and Kong Ban and Sing Lung decide to help the old boss to keep the money safe. After a lot of twists and fights, it appears that Tien Yeh has planned to keep the money for himself and to make the other groups to fight with each other. As the movie isn't subtitled, I can't give more information about the plot, but it's a superb action movie, with a great Kong Ban and good fights from Tien Yeh and Sing Lung. Worth watching.

**Twelve Deadly Coins (Hong Kong, 1969: Hsu Tseng-Hung)** - Master of coin throwing has escort company and too proud son. When silver of army gets robbed, Lo Lieh is on a mission to get funds back...This time Lo Lieh does not play streetsmart almost arrogant guy but straightforward brave man. His character is so noble that stepdaughter of bandit leader falls to him. Another girl who is close to son of Mr Deadly Coins have feelings for Lo Lieh too..There is loads of drama in the end when enemy from past confronts Deadly Coins. Will Lo Lieh ride to sunset with girl or not?If one has not seen, should check it out.

Excellent storyline without any dragging and action while nothing outstanding serves nicely it's purpose. Quality acting by Lo Lieh, Ching Li+others. I probably saw none or 1-2 at most lo lieh Shaw movies in past from vhs but while going through his movies in dvd era can say he is definitely one of fav actors. Very solid performances no matter is he villain or hero, more comedic or serious.

**Two Cavaliers, The (Taiwan, 1973: Yueh Feng)** - Lung-Kuo (Chan Sing) seeks revenge on Miss Flower (Gwok Siu-Chung - Fury Of King Boxer) who ordered the killing of his family. Getting beaten up and scalded before he can even reach her, into the mix comes mysterious and seemingly rich boy Lung-Fei (Jimmy Wang Yu) who starts to meddle in this affair. He approaches Miss Flower, flirts and engages in a romance with her but to what purpose and which side will he be on? Interesting stuff of the basher kind that doesn't provide narrative and drama of the revolutionary kind but director Yueh Feng possesses some fine skills in this department despite. It keeps matters from being generic and it's all definitely an engaging mix of basic bashing (that the leads add volumes to via their contributions) with a fun choreography concept involving ropes thrown in during the finale as well as an unexpectedly somber ending. Eddy Ko co-stars.

**Two Champions of Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1980: Chang Cheh)** - Chang Cheh's updating of his Shaolin cycle, featuring the Venoms in place of the likes of Fu Sheng and Chi Kuan Chun, is mostly a sign of lethargy intruding on the great director, with an very dull beginning of characters sitting in chairs and providing a Greek chorus.

Once the action commences, things improve, though the reasonable period authenticity of the earlier Shaolin films has gone out of the window - everyone looks dressed for a Village People video. The Shaolin heroes are amazingly brutal and callous: I found myself 100% behind the Wu Tang clan here!

Phillip Kwok is noticeable absent from the cast, though he did contribute to the fights (this is due to a dispute between him and Lu Feng over who would be the fight director). The main focus is on Lo Meng as "Shaolin Hercules" Tung Chen Chin (a minor character in *Men From The Monastery* and *Showdown At The Cotton Mill*) and Chiang Sheng as Hu Wei Chin (played by Chi Kuan Chun in those two films as well as *Shaolin Avengers*). For guys supposedly tormented by revenge (Tung's wife is killed before the wedding night nuptials!), they seem rather jolly and care free, even when tearing guy's penises off! Poor old Sun Chien gets precious little to do, and is given an especially awful pudding-bowl hair-cut that looks like someone forgot to eat the pudding first. The famous characters Fong Sai Yuk and San Te make brief appearances of little consequence: the actor playing San Te is particularly awful.

On the Wu Tang side, things are rather more interesting. A very young Chin Siu Ho makes his official debut as a kid with confused loyalties: frankly, he comes off as incredibly selfish and smug, but maybe that's the point. Still, it's nice to see that at least one of Chang Cheh's latterday discoveries went on to become a regular star. Wang Li and Yu Tai Ping get better roles than usual, and Candy Wen makes a very good impression as a real rarity: a genuinely interesting female character in a Chang Cheh film. There's also some ugly Monkey fighters - in fact, most of the

supporting cast in this seem to have been selected for being especially weird looking, possibly because Chang Cheh was getting fed up of the Venoms being called ugly!

But the main highlight of this film is Lu Feng as the main villain (it's meant to be a surprise, but come on, when it came to "surprise villains", Lu Feng was Shaw's answer to James Tien!) Lu had won an award the previous year for his role in *Shaolin Rescuers*, but it's here he really gets to shine: mixing charm with evil with great charisma.

Fights are a bit clunky: there is an awesome finishing move at the finale that makes up for the stodge though. Chang Cheh's usual sexual weirdness comes to the fore when a guy is hit in the back, and what is supposed to be either brain or spinal fluid instead looks like a very large ejaculation!

And yes, this is the movie that appears in the Chemical Brother's video for "Get Yourself High."

**Two Crippled Heroes (Taiwan, 1982: Joseph Siu)** - The last of three lead vehicles disabled performers Sam Chung-Chuen and Hong Chiu-Ming appeared in (although an international aka for this movie is *Crippled Masters 2: Two Crippled Heroes*), as with *The Crippled Master*, there's little sense of exploitation going on here as the duo are given a chance to play heroes of good morals and martial arts skill. Taking care of a temporarily blind girl who knows too much about the mayor's (played by Wang Hsieh) dealings with a warlord, it's all decent storytelling that is also merely a springboard for choreography suited for the performers lacking full usage of arms and legs respectively. Often complex and creative, a lot of emphasis is on Sam Chung-Chuen's knife throwing skills (which he does with his feet) and the package comes together more by the time the duo fights Addy Sung as the filmmakers find usage for Hong Chiu-Ming and the cart he uses to get around.

**Two Fists Against the Law (Hong Kong, 1980: Chan Chuen)** - Whenever I do these film binges, I don't expect all films reviewed to be good (or if I were to do a Bruno Mattei marathon, I wouldn't expect any of them to be good). I mean, that just comes with the territory. For every successful film within a certain mold, there are dozens that try to cash in it without understanding why the more successful example was as good as it was. The same thing (unfortunately) applies to Hwang Jang Lee: he made a lot of great films, but all too often appeared in movies in which the filmmakers were at a loss at how to use him effectively. After the mediocre *Eagle vs. Silver Fox* and the surreally bad *Angry Young Man*, I was hoping that my final foray into Hwang's filmography this year would be a better example of the craft. Thankfully, *Two Fists Against the Law* is not only good, but it's probably one of the best Hwang Jang Lee movies outside of his collaborations with Superkicker John Liu and Jackie Chan.

It shouldn't be too surprising that this film was produced by Ng See-Yuen and Seasonal Films. They were responsible for turning Hwang Jang Lee, who had toiled away in cheap (and probably shoddy) Korean films before, into a genre phenomenon in the first place. Ng See-Yuen had directed the landmark bootmaster hit *The Secret Rivals* and its sequel, and then served as producer on *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *The Drunken Master*, so he obviously knew a bit about Hwang and how he should be used in a fight. The directing chores this time were given to Chan Chuen, who spent most of the 1970s as an action director, most notably alongside Sammo Hung on *Kung Fu Queen* Angela Mao's early classics like *When Tae Kwon Do Strikes* and *The Tournament*. Chan got his start as an actual director the year before in the cult hit *Kung Fu vs. Yoga*.

There's an interesting parallel between these two movies in that they seem like choreographers' films. What I mean by that is that the main cast is made of martial arts choreographers. In *Kung Fu vs. Yoga*, the two protagonists were played by Alan Chui and Chin Yuet-Sang, two men who were usually relegated to supporting roles as villains or teachers, but were talented action directors behind the camera. *Two Fists Against the Law* carries this even further by having nearly every member of the cast be an action director, save Melvin Wong. Although not every actor plays a powerful martial artist, there's something refreshing about the idea of Chan Chuen and Ng See-Yuen giving a chance to actors often relegated to playing Thug #2, Disciple, Bodyguard, or Robber. And Alan Chui, who must have gotten along well with Chan, is back as one of the main protagonists. Heck, even Chui Fat, who would go on to direct and choreograph some of Donnie Yen's most hated films, like *Crystal Hunt*, shows up in this movie.

Another thing this movie does right is how it plays its story. By 1980, independent outfits like Seasonal Films (heck, even the Shaw Bros and Golden Harvest were already in on the game by this point) were eking out a living by ripping off *The Drunken Master* and trying to find the next Jackie Chan, or at least making a kung fu comedy that'd be both quick and cheap and worth a few bucks at the local box office. It's refreshing to see Seasonal Films try something a little different here. *Two Fists Against the Law* is still something of a kung fu comedy, especially in the first third. For a while you'll think it'll fit the "Seasonal Formula" quite well, what with the sadistic training sequences and acrobatic fight scenes played for laughs. But Chan Chuen plays the bait n' switch card after the first

act and the movie becomes a humorous kung fu Spaghetti Western and by the halfway mark, becomes a surprisingly brutal and bloody film. The final showdown, while not one of Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee's absolute best showcases, turns out to be one of his overall most intense fights, both physically and emotionally.

The plot revolves the exploits of two con men, Lee Yung (Chik Ngai-Hung, who choreographed the two unsung masterpieces *The Loot* and *The Deadly Challenger*) and Feng Erh (Alan Chui, who choreographed the epic *Rebellious Reign*). Feng makes his money by staging fights in places where people are sure to watch. Convincing his onlookers that his chi kung (i.e. iron shirt) technique is impenetrable, he bilks willing students out of their money in exchange for kung fu lessons that are nothing short of torture sessions. A large portion of the first act is spent with Feng and his unfortunate student, played by the recognizable little chub Chiang Kam (who worked as a choreographer in the extra footage of *Snake Fist Fighter*).

Lee Yung, on the other hand, earns his keep another way. Like Feng Ehr, Lee Yung is a extremely talented martial artist. But in Lee's case, he simply takes out loans to pay for his lifestyle and then beats the hell out of the loan sharks whenever they come to collect their money. That way, he's a lot like Roper in *Enter the Dragon*, although a lot less attractive. When we meet Lee, he's destroying a restaurant while beating up the latest group of debt collectors, led by Chung Faat, the film's choreographer (and also. Chung Faat is known for his strange appearances in his films, most notably as the "Crazy Eyebrow Guy" in *Yes, Madam!* and *Twinkle, Twinkle Lucky Stars*. Here he sports a fairly long perm, although he has no facial hair or crazy eyebrows this time around. Lee Yung eventually meets up with Feng Ehr and exposes his con to the latter's student, after which they get into a really long fight and find out that their distant cousins or something, just by the techniques they use. Oh, the things you can learn from a person's fighting style in these films. These days, it's all MMA and brutal groundfighting. If I followed UFC and all that crap more closely, I'd just love for a fighter to be interviewed after a brawl and say something like, "I could tell by the angle he was kneeling me in the head that he hailed from chaparral country in Northern California and that he has two sisters, one of whom is currently available."

While our heroes, so to speak, are thus making a living, the local police captain, Lawman Chang (Melvin Wong of *Righting Wrongs* and *Blonde Fury*), has a shipment delivered to him which he needs to deliver to the capital. I find it endlessly amusing that at this early stage in Melvin Wong's career, he's playing a police captain. You see, there was a time in Hong Kong cinema in which if you needed a certain profession, you automatically hired certain actors. When you needed a police chief, you either got Melvin Wong or Phillip Chan. If you needed a lawyer or a judge, you got Roy Chiao. If you wanted a charismatic crime boss, then you hired James Tien. I mean, that's just the way the cookie crumbled back in the 1980s in Hong Kong. So that's why I find it rather funny that even in old school chopsocky movies, Melvin Wong played a police chief.

Back to the film, Chang and his two deputies, Cross-Eyes (To Siu-Ming, *The Victim* and *The Young Master*) and Overbite Guy (Baan Yun-Sang, whose choreographer credits include *Killer in White* and *Circus Kids*), are tasked with transporting the goods. Not too far out of the city limits, they are confronted with a legion of robbers led by Prince Tai (Chin Dik-Hak, who served as action director for *Tigress of Shaolin* and *The Deadly Secret*), who runs the local pawn shop and is the son of the richest man in town. Although Chang is more than willing to confront the robbers in combat, his two flunkies hold him back and Prince Tai gets off with the loot. I'm going to assume that Lawman Chang doesn't storm Chez Tai himself and get the loot back because Prince Tai's father (who'll be played later on by Hwang Jang Lee, choreographer of *Five Fingers of Steel* and *Eagle vs. Silver Fox*) is nicknamed "Devil Tai" and one cop plus two cowardly deputies surely wouldn't be enough to stop someone with a name like that. So Chang has Lee Yung arrested at random, since he apparently had some business dealings with Prince Tai in the past.

Feng Erh sneaks into the police station via the rafters while Lee Yung is being interrogated. Chang realizes this, and thus mentions out loud that the goods stolen were 7 million dollars in gold bars. That's more than enough to get both interested in recovering the goods. Feng breaks Lee out of the joint and together they formulate a wacky plan to get into Tai's place, which I assume is heavily guarded. First, Lee Yung opens a pawn shop which pays generously for just about any useless item that one can imagine (ripped jackets, old caps, etc.). This draws the attention of Prince Tai, since it means that his own establishment will be in danger. Prince Tai goes to Lee's pawn shop to see what's up and picks a fight with Lee Yung. Of course, Lee Yung being the martial artist he is, gives the rich little bastard a sound thrashing. The only reason Lee doesn't beat Prince Tai to death on the spot is because Feng Ehr appears out of nowhere and saves the wealthy jerk.

Playing the hero, Feng Ehr hands the injured Tai over to his father, who's obviously grateful for Feng's service. However, when it comes to talking a reward, Devil Tai sees right through Feng and figures that he was in on the beating himself. So Devil Tai kicks the crap out of Feng and has him imprisoned so that he may savor Feng's death later on. Lee Yung then shows up bandaged up in the same way that Prince Tai is and frees Feng Ehr. They also kidnap the crippled Prince Tai and soon through the magic of the Chinese Cinematic Law of Mistaken Identities, Devil Tai is soon kicking his own son to death. Of course he doesn't know it at the moment, but you can bet that he'll be a little irate when he figures out just how he's been snookered.

Lee Yung and his cohort hand the gold over to Lawman Chang after discovering that the bricks aren't made of gold, but of opium. Chang knew this from the beginning and spun the whole gold yarn in order to have those two conmen do his work for him. Now that just leaves us with the unenviable task of transporting the opium to the

capital. At this point, Cross-Eyes and Overbite Guy, who have made no contribution to the plot so far, decide to repay their employer's kindness and transport the goods themselves. Those two will soon learn that they have a date with Devil Tai, an encounter which they have no hope in the world of surviving. News of their demise reaches Lawman Chang via a dying messenger who delivers Overbite Guy's torn-out jaw(!) to him. Now Lawman Chang rather liked those two wusses, so he's not going to take this sitting down. But the question stands: Is he powerful enough to take on Devil Tai all by himself? And what of Lee and Feng, who have since washed their hands of this whole escort business?

My criticisms of this film are few. For one, I thought it was a bit of a cheat to have one of those opening sequences where the main stars perform martial arts forms to a red background and have Alan Chui demonstrate his *jian*, or straight sword, skills and then not use them in any of the fight scenes. I understand the dramatic reason for Hwang Jang Lee not using more of his trademark kicks in the finale (more on that in a little bit), but I would've liked to have seen a few more. Finally, I think the first third, which is in large part only tangentially related to the main plot, could've been edited a little more tightly and maybe integrated into the main story more. I mean, I know it's a tall order to ask for this movies to have air-tight plots, but Chiang Kam and Chung Faat disappear completely from the film after their scenes and I think the writers could've found a way to bring them back. For example, Chiang Kam could've been the one to expose Feng Ehr to Devil Tai; he'd certainly have reason to, having been swindled and all. The filmmakers could've had Chung Faat and his bill-collecting mob show up at the pawn shop for one more fight before Prince Tai got involved. Little things, my friends. Little things.

Of course, I'm always glad to see Alan Chui get work and even star as one of the main protagonists. I've said this somewhere, but casual HK viewers will remember him more for his role as the laughing villain from Jet Li's *Last Hero in China*. He's a wonderful acrobat and he gets to show off a lot of spin kicks and Southern style-based hand techniques here. His timing is impeccable and few films showcase his skills like this one does (if you're in a good mood, check out *Daggers* 8). Despite this being a kung fu comedy, Alan mainly plays his role straight, which is good. Hong Kong had enough kung fu dopes mugging in front of the camera by 1980 that I'm glad we didn't have to sit through 90 minutes of Alan Chui doing the same.

Chik Ngai-Hung acquits himself surprisingly well as the film's other hero. His character is a lot like David Chiang from the previous year's *The Deadly Challenger*, in that he's a lovable con artist who uses his kung fu to get himself out trouble he himself is responsible for. Chik's fighting is a lot less descript until the end, when he starts performing multiple styles against Hwang Jang Lee, including monkey kung fu. Like Alan Chui, he largely plays his role straight, leaving the comedy for some of the other characters (mainly the two Sheriff's deputies). I'm glad that Chan Chuen saw enough in him that he was cast as a lead this time around.

Then of course, there's Hwang Jang Lee. This is one of Hwang's best films in terms of both screen time and fight time. Sure, it takes him about 45 minutes to show up, but once he does, the film never lets up. Most of his flashier kicks are saved for his first two fights. In his first duel, he takes on a surprised Alan Chui. In less than two minutes, we get to see Hwang perform his triple no-shadow kick, a leg lock that allows Hwang to boot Alan multiple times in the head, and his other famous kick in which he wraps it around the person's neck and performs a "donkey" kick. When he fights his own son later on, he performs a neat aerial kick in which he jumps into the air, does a front kick to the chest with one foot and a roundhouse kick to the head with the other.

In his last three fights, Hwang's moves are a bit more standard. He uses his usual Eagle claws to compliment his kicks, just he's done in so many other films. His kicks are a lot less flashy though, although I know the reason why. His character is angry and desperate for revenge. He's less concerned about showing off his awesome skills and would prefer to finish off his enemies with more powerful applications of basic moves. So we get to see more side kicks, roundhouse kicks and spin kicks during the final duels. He does perform a jumping front roundhouse kick and a kangaroo kick during the last two fights, though. The final showdown between Hwang and our two heroes becomes extremely violent, as the combatants become increasingly battered and bloodied as they desperately try to kill each other. Lives are sacrificed in order to buy time for the other and Hwang in his desperation even produces a weapon: a buzz saw at the end of a chain. This really ranks up with the final fights of *The Prodigal Son*, *The Victim*, and *The Thundering Mantis* as the most intense showdowns of the old school era. Although Chung Faat was known more as a stuntman than as a fight choreographer (he was assistant choreographer to *The Odd Couple* and has two other action director credits), you'd can just see how Chung's working all the time with Sammo Hung rubbed off on his own choreography style.

**Two Great Cavaliers (Taiwan, 1978: Yang Ching-Chen) – aka Blade of Fury; Deadly Duo** - It's a period piece with some pretty nice props, sets, and costumes. Why, it almost has that Shaw Bros. feel to it. The plot is standard issue. The Han and the Manchu hate each other, and there's a list of members of the rebellion that both sides want.

The action begins immediately as Sung Hua (LKY) and a couple of men attack a group of men who are in possession of the list. The skirmish is brief, and Sung is successful (though his men aren't). He runs into Col. Chung (CS), a traitor for the Manchus...or is it the Hans? Doesn't matter. Another fight ensues. Sung is severely wounded, but manages

to both hide the list and elude capture to be rescued by...well, somebody.

Cut to Ou Chun (JL) walking along with his fiancé. They just happen to run into some bandits posing as woodcutters. Liu goes into his signature kick mode, but his fiancé is whisked away by...well, somebody.

Arriving at a village, Chun runs into Hsiao Mei (AM) who is meeting with her co-conspirators, one of which is Wan Lei (CSY). It is a couple of their men who had absconded with Chun's girl. Why? Well, Chun doesn't want to fight against the Manchus. He only wants to be married and live happily ever after. But Mei won't have it and acts quite petulant about it, which leaves me to think that these characters had a past romantic relationship, though that is never stated. Chun takes his girl and leaves. Mei follows him out into the dark and is suddenly set upon by assassins. As she battles them, Pai Lung Hsing (WCL), a swordsman dressed in shimmering white robes appears and helps her.

Thus, the characters are all in play, and movie moves along at a fast but tiresome pace. The fights are many, and typical. During all this, Chun's girlfriend tries to convince him that he must help the rebels, even attempting to kill him at one point to force him to do so after fighting off another round of assassins. She herself is killed, and he is poisoned just as Pai Lung arrives. Chun carries with him an acupuncture chart that contains the cure. As Pai Lung begins to administer the needles, more assassins attack. After fending them off, he returns to find Chun has been taken by...well, somebody.

I'm not going to lie. By this point, I am bored out of my mind (with the advent of a head cold setting in) and begin fast-forwarding through dialogue. What eventually happens is that Mei learns of place where Yang Chun (KH), a master of the art of Fung Wan, lives, and she needs to go there for whatever reason. (I'm sure it has something to do with the list.) Gaining entrance through a mystical portal in the face of cliff requires that one follow a specific Kung Fu stepping pattern over mist-covered posts, with any misstep triggering some sort of booby trap.

She and Pai Lung get in to discover that Sung is there suffering from the poison that Chun was exposed to. Pai Lung uses the chart he got from Chun, and Sung recovers. But then Chun himself appears. It seems he was faking the whole time, already having taken an antidote for the poison. He's also faking about not wanting to take on the Manchus. At this point, Wan Lei, a traitor himself, enters with Manchu assassins and there's a throwdown.

This all leads to a final confrontation with Col. Chung in an open field. (Of course.) And honestly, the end fight is really the only redeeming aspect of the movie. Chung takes on everyone: Chun, Mei, Sung, and the other Chun. But mainly Mei and Chun. (The John Liu one.) It's not the best 2 on 1 fight I've ever seen. Not the worst either, but still...

Chan Sing makes for an atypical villain here. Why? Because he only appears at the beginning and end of the film, for one thing. The other is his handstrikes, which are particular devastating and deadly. But you say, "Hey, every villain's handstrikes are like that." Oh yeah? Does every villain's handstrikes sound like a rifle firing when he hits somebody? That's right. (That's probably what it would sound like if Clint Eastwood ever starred in a kung fu movie.) He does suffer a rather weird end. I mean, I see what the choreographers were going for but...meh.

I've seen a lot of clips of John Liu over the years, but never really sat through a movie he was the star of. Overall, the fighting is pretty typical. John Liu does what John Liu does: he uses his right leg like a giant wet noodle and repeatedly smacks the crap out of everybody in reach, or he lifts it up with his hand so he's doing a vertical split (because there's no way anyone will realize he's going to give them an axe kick to the head).

Angela Mao is sorely underused in this. Her character really doesn't rank a lot of screen time, and then it's mainly her looking all pouty. Her fights are good, and she even does a little weapon fighting; but make no mistake, she's more of a supporting player here, which is a shame.

I don't know that I would recommend this. It's not a gigantic waste of time to watch it, but if I'd never seen it, I don't think I would have missed anything. I'm certainly not impressed with John Liu. I mean, he's flexible and all that, but I didn't really see where he was performing any choreography that was all that challenging for him. It all just seemed kind of "run of the mill" compared to the clips of him I've seen. He does have screen presence, I'll give him that.

Both of the choreographers (LKY & KH) appear in the film, too. I'm sure it was a good experience for them, but I never saw anything innovative or really interesting in what they did. But I'll probably watch the fights again at some point. Maybe I'll get more out of it. And maybe they'll find that list.

**Two Heroes Shooting Stars (Taiwan, 1980: Ke Shih Hao) – Roving Heroes, Buddhas Palm and Dragon Fist; Buddhist Fist and Chess Boxing** - Li Yi Min and Chi Kwan Chun compete for centre stage in this perfect platform for their respective skills and its difficult to say who comes out on top. The plot is something about Lee Yi Min being manipulated by a villainess, and her lackeys, intent on wiping out her enemies while Chi Kwan Chun is on the trail of said bad guys.

Plot takes second place to the superb action which comes at regular intervals. Lee Yi Min's acrobatic skills and perfect timing are matched by Chi Kwan Chun's solid shapes and Sun Su Po makes the perfect villain. Lee Yi Min's

epic battle against a troupe of red (and rather too tightly) suited swordsmen is a real showstopper and the 'two on one' finale is classic kung fu.

**Two Toothless Tigers (Hong Kong, 1980: Ricky Lau)** - Absolutely abysmal kung-fu comedy involving Sammo Hung, Yuen Shun-Yi and a lot of the former's dependent on- and off-screen talent. Within a high standard career, logically there are lulls and this one comes off as desperately wanting to belong to a trend. More a Yuen Shun-Yi than a Sammo Hung vehicle largely, the last 20 minutes do give way for Sammo and his team's action with a couple of excellent and hard hitting fight scenes. Of note is the finale with Johnny Wang versus the two leads that features highlight footage of hard kicks and falls that look borderline lethal.

**Two Wondrous Tigers (Hong Kong, 1980: Cheung Sum)** - Trouble begins when the son of an evil gangleader takes a fancy to Yeung Pan Pan and proposes marriage in a rather forceful, and less than romantic, manner. Knowing that her unwanted admirer isn't the best martial artist Yeung Pan Pan proclaims that anyone wishing to marry her has to defeat not only her in a fight but also her brother and sister as well; all kung fu experts. This doesn't deter the son, however, who offers 1000 dollars to anyone who can defeat the three siblings. Yeung Pan Pan and her family then face challenge after challenge until Tiger (John Chang) and Robert Ko (Phillip Ko) turn up, two guys that have already caught Yeung Pan Pan's eye. Matters become a little more complicated when the real villain, the evil gang leader (played by Tiger Young), enters the fray and kidnaps Yeung Pan Pan for himself. It then falls to Tiger and Robert to rescue her.

The plot is certainly adequate as a vehicle for getting the viewer from one fight to the next and the film maintains a steady pace. The director is also careful to take time to properly develop the on-screen friendship between Tiger and Robert. The fight scenes maintain a high standard throughout the film with great camera work that follows the action and plenty of interesting and original choreography, courtesy of Wilson Tong. Another Frankie Chan soundtrack helps to create just the right mood.

The film climaxes in a wonderful two on one fight between Yeung Pan Pan and John Chang vs Tiger Young who makes for a classic villain. The one disappointment is that Phillip Ko doesn't appear in the end and neither does Wilson Tong, and so the final showdown isn't quite everything that it was building up to be.

**Unbeaten 28, The (Taiwan, 1980: Joseph Kuo)** - A tale of revenge and redemption from cult Independent Kung Fu Director Joseph Kuo. This isn't an essential Kung Fu classic but still worth a look. The cinematography and fight choreography are all fine. The opening fight sequence is pretty good for it's time. However most of the film's run time is made up of Martial Arts training sequences and tests. Compared to many films of this era there's actually very little fight action. Still if you are a fan of the cast it's worth a look.

Meng Fei plays Tiger, who witnesses the brutal death of his father. Jack Long plays the Kung Fu master who takes Tiger under his wing and trains him in the art of Wu-Tang kung fu. The boy is put through extreme training from a young age and lives on a diet of Tiger's milk. He is forced to hold huge rocks and repeatedly push his hands into hot ash to name a few things. Social services would have Jack Long locked up these days but back in medieval China this was the norm. Long is preparing Tiger for the Martial Arts Gauntlet that takes place in the Shaolin Temple. There are 18 challenges to go through. The film's title is supposed to be a reference to this but for some reason it says The Unbeaten 28. It should read The Unbeaten 18 instead. The film is worth watching just for the gauntlet sequence alone. Tiger encounters stone men, a giggling one armed statue and oddball living down a well. He even withstands the brutal 36 blows from two masochistic monks with nothing better to do.

This film is not the best but it's far from the worst. At best it's average with some standout scenes and a decent final showdown. Nearly all Kung Fu films feature prolonged training scenes. This one devotes nearly all the film to it which can be a bit tiresome. I picked this up on the old M.I.A Old-School Kung Fu label. When compared with many independent Martial arts DVD releases the picture/sound quality's very good. The film is presented in Widescreen with an English only audio track. So expect some really bad one liners and crazy accents.

**Undeclared Sword, The (Hong Kong, 1970: Ling Yun, Yuan Qiu-Feng)** - Master Sha, the chief of the Purple Mansion, sends his best pupil Tung Koon (a one armed swordsman) to his native village in order to get rid of a group of what he calls villains. When he returns in his village, Tung Koon discovers that his father has been murdered and he decides to avenge him. Finally, he discovers that the supposed villains are led by the blacksmith, who is in love with Tung

Koon's ancient fiancée.

The two men decide to fight against each other, and Tung Koon discovers that the blacksmith wears the same jade pendant as his and the blacksmith's mother tells them that they actually are brothers and that Master Sha forced their father to send Tung Koon to his Purple Mansion. They also discover that the villains are actually those from the Purple Mansion and not those from Tung Koon's village. The two brothers decide to return to the Purple Mansion in order to destroy it and to avenge their father's death. A very good movie, with an interesting plot and good fights. Don't miss this one.

**Valiant Ones, The (Hong Kong, 1975: King Hu)** - Most Chinese film scholars generally consider this 1975 production to be King Hu's last masterpiece. It was made as part of a two-film deal for Golden Harvest – the other one being *The Fate of Lee Khan* – and though both films share much of the same cast and ideals they are very different films. *Lee Khan* is on a much smaller and more intimate scale – deftly dealing with intrigues and conspiracies within the confines of an inn for nearly the entire picture, while *The Valiant Ones* is more epic in nature, full of action and most of the film takes place in the open spaces of the Chinese countryside. In both films though, Hu focuses on the themes of individual heroism and their sacrifice for a greater cause.

As in all of Hu's films, the composition and cinematography is stunning – close to picture perfect at times. His wonderful use of close ups, wide angle view and tracking shots always allows the viewer to get a total sense of what is happening. His editing during the action scenes is fast, innovative (for the time) and exciting and it pulls you right into the vortex of the action. He has a great eye for detail and authenticity and the sets and costumes look terrific.

Once the background story is initially set up, *The Valiant Ones* becomes nearly a non-stop series of action set pieces that Hu uses to explore his fascination for military strategy and tactics and how by using them correctly a small force can overcome a much larger one (something that holds great interest for him in *A Touch of Zen* as well). Hu utilizes many different variations and scenarios within this action feast that keeps the film from becoming monotonous. The first action set piece is within the closed in space of an inn – but afterwards Hu moves the camera outside and gives us everything from one on one fights to two against many to a small group utilizing tactics and the landscape brilliantly to defeat a large group of the enemy.

Initially Hu seems to be less than interested in developing the characters and he spends next to no time giving any information on any of them and has very little interaction between them except during the action scenes. But during the course of the film, the action itself and the manner in which they comport themselves in action begins to give hints as to their personalities and by the end they are – if far from fully realized individuals – characters that you care about.

The film takes place in the 16th century during the Ming Dynasty and the Imperial Court is unable to defeat the many Japanese and Chinese pirates that are plaguing the coastline. There is much evidence that men of influence are assisting the pirates and so the court finally turns to the one man whose integrity is irreproachable. This is Yu Dayou (a real life character played by Roy Chiao) and he assembles around him a small group of fighters that he trusts. Lau Kong and Lee Man-tai play his two main subordinates – but he also has the services of a legendary swordsman called The Whirlwind (Pai Ying) and his silent but extremely deadly wife (Hsu Feng).

They are an awesome group of fighters and they slowly whittle away at the much larger pirate force by setting ambushes, drawing them out bit by bit and cutting them to pieces. These action pieces play out very well – lots of sword fighting and kung fu – but it is the intelligence that Hu brings to them that makes them particularly enjoyable. In one of the earlier fights – Chiao literally uses a Go board to track the enemy movements and uses it to configure a response to outmaneuver them.

In one of the most enjoyable segments of the film, Pai Ying and Hsu Feng pretend to desert to the enemy and are taken to their hideaway. Before the pirates accept them, Han Ying Chieh – one of the head pirates - has them tested for their fighting abilities. First up is a very young Yuen Biao, then Yuen Wah and three others, then Simon Yuen in an archery contest and it ends with a challenge from Mars. It is a nice showcase for the skills of all the actors involved – and acts almost as a quiet respite before the final battle.

The final clash between all the remaining pirates and Chiao's men (and some well-placed dynamite) is bloody and ferocious – and a number of the good guys are killed off. Hu saves the best for last though – as Pai Ying and the head pirate Hakatatsu (Sammo Hung in fearsome white face paint) go one on one in an incredibly tense duel of thrusting swords, spinning somersaults and deadly Ninja stars. Hu ends the film in a classical and powerful freeze frame as the camera slowly pulls back to show what has been wrought.



This film doesn't have the powerful and charismatic central character of many of Hu's earlier films – Golden Swallow in *Come Drink with Me* or Miss Yang in *A Touch of Zen* – it is more of an ensemble piece – and this lack of a main hero hurts the film to some degree. Still, I found this to be highly engrossing – filmmaking at its finest in many ways – and that it has a cumulative effect on you. The action, which is choreographed by Sammo, shows a marked improvement over that in *The Fate of Lee Khan*, which he did as well. As the film works its way through all the different action pieces, I became much more involved with the story and the characters. This clearly wasn't the effect it had on all my companions though! One had fallen asleep, another complained that it was not very involving and a third thought it was beautifully filmed but not very good. Thankfully, another fellow has been wise enough to call it "glorious" on the Mobius Board so at least I know I wasn't watching a mirage of my own making. So there you have it – five opinions for the price of one!

I was fortunate enough to see this in a theater – but it is out on tape from Tai Seng. Regrettably, the tape is not letterboxed and the subtitles are often cut off on both sides making it difficult to follow. This is a film that truly needs to be seen in letterbox format because Hu uses the entirety of the screen and so much detail and movement is lost in the video format.

**Valley of the Double Dragon (Taiwan, 1974: Ulysses Au) - aka Golden Leopard's Brutal Revenge; Kung Fu of Taekwondo-** It takes place during WW2 in Japanese-occupied China. I remember it was very gritty, brutal, and tragic. A basher film, more or less. Korean star Jin Pal Kim was a decent kicker, too bad he didn't do more movies. Robert Baker as a Nazi officer was odd with that mini-fro and handlebar moustache he sports but he was ruthless and sadistic. This movie was also the only screen appearance of William Sheila, the black man who played the downed US pilot the Chinese resistance group helped and in turn helps them. It was rare to see a black man in Chinese cinema, especially in 1974 but he got a lot of onscreen time in this movie. Couldn't find any other information about him but he was obviously a martial artist as he fought a few times here.

**Vengeance (Hong Kong, 1970: Chang Cheh) - a.k.a Kung Fu Vengeance** - When Opera performer and Martial Artist Guan Yu-Lou (Ti Lung), warns lecherous gangster Feng Kai Shan (Ku Feng) to stay away from his wife. He awakens the full wrath of the local criminals, who plot to kill the righteous Guan Yu-Lou. Starting a whirlwind of bloody violence in a small city in 1920's China.

Blades galore in this old school Shaw Brothers actioner, where the celluloid is bathed in blood. Chang Cheh pulls no punches yet again, with a stripped down basic story of bloody revenge. With his highly stylized ballet of blade orientated violence. There's no fancy Martial Arts on display here, it's mostly down and dirty fights that end up with someone being killed. The film's opening credits set the tone perfectly, with a primitive drum driven score created by composer Wang Fu-Ling. This score gives a great sense of foreboding which really suits the production. The story is set almost entirely at night and filmed almost entirely on sound stages. This gives the film a really heavy and unique atmosphere. Shaw Brothers idol David Chiang plays the quite brooding Guan Xiao-Lou, who arrives in the city with one thing on his mind, vengeance.

There is so much I could say about this movie, which was my first taste of the Shaw Brothers studio. However I will try and stick to covering the action scenes, in particular the use of weapons. There's not a great variety of them on display here. Yet each fight heavily features knives, along with hatchets and blades that could be best described as small swords. Like the one Guan Xiao-Lou keeps up his sleeve. In the same way a card game hustler might keep an ace up their sleeves, only with more bloody results.

Our first encounter see's Ti Lung's character standing up to local gangster Feng Kai Shan at his dojo. First he smashes the sign in half, he then uses the divided pieces to both defend himself and clobber opponents with. It's only a brief fight, but it's nicely staged with a few kicks here and there. Like I said earlier the fights don't feature a great deal of Kung Fu techniques. At least not by the standard's of most Hong Kong actioners of the time. When Feng Kai's friends hear of this they advise him to murder Guan Yu-Lou in the local tea house. With the local law enforcement in their pockets, they have no worries of any repercussions. When Guan turns up at the tea rooms, he's ambushed with a knife thrown into his shoulder. Within seconds he's fighting for his life, slashing and hacking at anyone who gets within his striking range. The action is very similar in its style the violence seen in Sergio Leone movies. Stuntman pose dramatically as they die, and certain moments of violence are prolonged. For the most part it's a desperate fight for survival, and while fantastical in its approach, it does capture and convey a real sense of desperation.

Going back to the Leone influence, most of the lackeys/fighters in the film wear their knives on belts. Similar to the way a gun belt is worn in a western. For added Leone influence there's samples of Ennio Morricone's spaghetti westerns score, which is used superbly to create tension. There's some great use of his score in the tea room sequence described above too. Chang Cheh intercut scenes of Ti Lung's character performing on stage, with his fight to survive. Despite being very bloody, the violence is not realistic and certainly leans more towards the theatrical side. Which may be the reason Chang Cheh spliced in the opera scene's, in the tea room sequence?.

Anyway let's get back to the weapons/fights, before I go off rambling in another direction again. The team of Tong Kai and Yuen Cheung-Yang do a really amazing job of creating some exciting screen combat. Tong Kai(The Chinese Boxer) was a veteran with tens years experience when he made this movie. Yuen Cheung-Yan(Seven Grand Masters) was not new to the job himself, but had less movies under his belt at the time. In some ways the use of knives are very much like encounters seen in The Club(1981). The action in Vengeance is more far-fetched, but you can see how it may have influenced knife use in future movies. From watching this production again, I'd say it had some influence on the knife fights featured in Bruce Lee's The Big Boss, made only the following year.

David Chiang's character is pursued almost from the moment he sets foot in the crime ridden city. Even a trip to the local opera house gets violent, when he's followed to the toilets by two thugs. It's not long until one of them is trying to choke him with a chain. Not the most elaborate of weapons but certainly a big favourite in Martial Arts movies. He dodges the chain swipes and slows his opponent down by ducking his head into some water. He is then pursued into the theatre rafters, where the fight reaches its violent climax. The sounds of the opera crowd drowning out any sounds of a struggle.

Next he goes in pursuit of Feng Kai Shan at his heavily guarded city mansion. Some fans might recognize the elaborate set from other Shaw Brothers productions, and it also appeared in Jackie Chan's Project A, in the 1980's. With the help of his brother's wife's alluring sister Hua Zheng-Feng(Alice Au Yin-Ching). She distracts the guards and allows him to stealthily enter the house. Taking most of them out one at a time, with a blade in the back or across the throat. Look out for a young Yuen Wo Ping and Cliff Lok during this sequence. When he finally meets Feng Kai, it's yet another desperate but brief fight to the death.

With so many people linked to Yu-Lou's death, there was no way even David Chiang's character could face them all at once. Instead we get a lot of briefer fight scenes, leading up to the big finale. Where he faces a corrupt Marshall, with his top bodyguards and the last remaining gangster Jin Zhi-Quan(Yeung Chi-Hing). Armed with twin blades, Guan Xiao-Lou dishes out his final punishment. Throats are cut, stomachs are gouged, and anyone who's bad gets mangled or mutilated by his unforgiving knives. His opponents have come prepared as well, armed with their own knives of choice. Decked out entirely in a white suit, Xiao-Lou starts to resemble a walking Jackson Pollack painting pretty quickly. He's equally skilled at throwing the knives as he is at wielding them. Launching them at people from a distance with deadly accuracy. It's a truly classic movie finale, and one I never tire of seeing. Watch out for a very young Fung Hak On during this action packed sequence.

Vengeance is certainly a must see for old school Hong Kong movie followers. However, if you are looking for a straight up Kung Fu fest, this is not where to find it. What bare handed fights/moves we do see are more Judo like in style. At times, some of the action reminded me of the Judo based fights scenes featured in the early Sean Connery Bond films. Those movies being very popular at that time, may have had some influence?. There's a sequence where David Chiang chops away at a man's kidneys, which will make you feel nauseous, if you know what it feels like to be hit there. While there's no wire use that I could see, you can expect some trampoline assisted leaps in places.

The movie is packed with some terrific performances all round. Like I mentioned earlier I could have written so much more about this film, and feel I've overlooked a lot of it. Wang Ping is great as the cold hearted Hua Zheng Fang, even if she only has a minor role. Ku Feng puts on yet another fine performance as the shady gang leader. With Ti Lung on top form in his few scenes, there's only a short flashback sequence featuring him and David Chiang together on screen. Hoh Ban and Yuen Chi-Hing also deserve special mention for their villainous performances. There's also the added bonus of a small cameo by Chang Sing, as a rifle carrying killer for hire. If you like your films to be no frills and straight to the point, then you won't be disappointed with this one.

**Vengeance is a Golden Blade (Hong Kong, 1969: Ho Meng-Hua)** - A righteous swordsman and head of an escort company, Li Zhi Shan is confronted by the Long Brothers and their men. The Long Brothers are also in the security business but often rob the shipments they are hired to protect. The evil Long Zhen Tian is also secretly having an affair with Li's duplicitous wife, Li Yue Shiang. After losing a duel with Li Zhi Shan, who possesses the Golden Dragon Blade, the most powerful sword in the martial world, Li's wife plots to kill him and place ownership of the blade into

the hands of Long Zhen Tian. The plan to steal the sword is successful but Li is crippled in the succeeding fight but manages to escape with his daughter, Hsiao Yan and loyal servant, Li Sheng. Li forsakes his life as a swordsman and takes up collecting herbs with a kindly old man, Liu An Zheng and his grandson, Liu Ching Song in the forest outside of the decadence of the city. However, the evil Long Gang, now taking up robbing wearing masks and terrorizing the city with the Golden Dragon Blade are not far behind. Eighteen years pass and unexpectedly, Hsiao Yan meets up with her mother and so the troubles for Li Zhi Shan begin anew. Now faced with losing his daughter over long kept secrets as well as being blamed for the wrongs caused by his near invincible family sword, he has worked on a counter blade called the Hang Long Sword which will be the only weapon that can destroy the Golden Dragon Blade. In the end, several shocking secrets are revealed and Hsiao Yan must choose between filial love and ultimate vengeance.

If ever there was a Shaw Brothers swordplay picture that seemed modeled on old Hollywood style productions it's *Vengeance is a Golden Blade* (1969). Ho Meng Hua fashions what is possibly his finest cinematic achievement. Characterization takes center stage here and Ho truly shows some exceptional skill handling the many dramatic sequences. Although the fight scenes aren't up to the caliber of other swordplay films of the time, the actors do an extraordinary job of creating sympathy and apathy for the protagonists and antagonists found within. Some of the plot twists recall scenarios found later in the 1977 thru 1983 *Star Wars* trilogy.

Chin Ping delivers a captivating performance as the naive Hsiao Yan who later in the film becomes a vengeful swordswoman conflicted by familial strife and coping with an ever crumbling emotional state as she gradually learns startling truths about her past. One of the best moments in the film is when she delivers the head of one of the Long brothers to her mother followed soon after by Hsiao and Liu Ching Song storming the Long stronghold to rescue her kidnapped father and friends. The last 15 minutes reveals one last major plot twist that will raise a few eyebrows made all the better by the tactfully handled performances by the actors. Chin successfully pulls off the inexperienced young country bumpkin who is warned of the dangers of the big city. Her father is hesitant to allow her to accompany Liu Ching Song and his grandfather there because of her gullible tendencies.

This allusion leads to a scene wherein Hsiao meets up with her mother who slips her a drug in her tea so as to catch a pretty girl for a sleazy aristocrat, Master Ping. Luckily, Hsiao Yan hears Liu calling her from outside the window. Upon hearing her name, the deceitful Li Yue Shiang realizes this is her daughter all grown up. Li now decides to take Hsiao Yan away from Li Zhi Shan and reveal his secret lest he refuse to allow her to take her daughter away. You never learn what the above mentioned secret is Li Yue Shiang threatens to reveal until near the end. It provides a major whammy to the ensuing finale leaving you wondering just how it all will really end for the major participants.

A later scene similar to the one described above has even more profound resonance once the big secret is revealed towards the end. In it, Hsiao disguise herself as a girl whose father has died and she is giving herself to Long Zhen Tian to pay for her father's funeral. Long tries to have his way with her until Li Yue Shiang breaks in and makes Long wise to the situation. Unknown to Hsiao at the time and not revealed until later is that Long is actually Hsiao's father(!) Since Li Zhi Shan constantly practiced his martial skills, he soon became impotent and unable to bear children. His wife had an affair with Long and soon went back to him helping plot the murder of Li. Hsiao is once again conflicted with emotional contention and denies Long as her father and runs away. At this moment, it appears that both lead villains may actually change their ways. The next day, Li packs his things to leave. Now that the truth is finally out, he thinks his adopted daughter has chosen to remain with her real parents and so decides to live a life as a vagrant. The vicious Long and Li's adulterous wife show up for one last stand-off; this time to finally kill Li Zhi Shan. Li pleads with them to leave him alone since he has the Golden Dragon Blade and his daughter but Long wishes to kill him. At the last moment, Hsiao Yan appears and saves her adopted father having found the Hang Long Sword which was hidden in a well earlier by Li.

Tang Ching conveys the best performance over all the others as the noble swordsman Li Zhi Shan; a man who once was a respected security head and now must live like a poor farmer living in the mountains and caves in order to avoid the evil of the Long brothers as well as protect his loving daughter from her cruel mother. As already mentioned, Li refuses to reveal the truth to Hsiao about her past and in so doing causes her to leave him for the more luxurious trappings of her mother, Li Yue Shiang who turns out to not be the loving mother she pretends to be. Tang represents pity in this film. Having fallen from grace after losing his business, his prestigious sword, his reputation and his wife among other things he is crippled by Long Zhen Tian early on after two attempts to be poisoned by his wife. Throughout the film Li is plagued with all manner of obstacles that belittle his once proud name. Having to live in the mountains away from society, the numerous attempts to make his life miserable as well as ridicule and degradation on the part of the Long brothers are part of the humiliation Li endures throughout the film. I've seen Tang in later Wu Xia films such as *The Magic Blade* (1976), *Rendezvous with Death* (1980) and *Clan Feuds* (1982) but he really stands out in *Vengeance is a Golden Blade* (1969) and is as integral to the plot, if not more so, than Chin Ping's character.

Yue Hua pulled off a similar feat with his stand out performance in Cheng Kang's *Pursuit* (1972). But here, Yue Hua is more of a supporting character playing the love interest of Chin Ping's Hsiao Yan. He doesn't get as much screen time as the others, but he figures in all the major fight scenes. Although it's mentioned early on that both Liu Ching Song and Hsiao Yan are the purported lovers, this plot point is pretty much dropped not long after it's introduced. It's understandable though considering all the dramatical twists and turns the story takes during its 98 minute running time.

Future director Kao Pao Shu is the real villain of the piece playing the unfaithful and treacherous Li Yue Shiang who, for a time, pulls the strings of the Long brothers gang to accomplish her goals. She is the center by which the film revolves and she forms the basis for all the turmoil and angst placed upon Li Zhi Shan and his adopted daughter, the very daughter she seeks to reclaim at any cost. She does show some concern for her daughter during one sequence after she manages to convince Hsiao Yan to side up with her. In it, the sordid Master Ping's servant finds her wandering the halls of the brothel and entices her into Ping's room. He uses a ploy to knock Hsiao unconscious by using a drug. Li Yue Shiang rebels against Ping having his way with her daughter but she is quickly run out of the room. Thankfully, Liu Ching Song shows up to rescue Hsiao Yan from certain sexual assault. Kao Pao Shu would direct her first film *Lady with a Sword* in 1971 starring the alluring Lily Ho and also the non-Shaw Jimmy Wang Yu flick, *The Desperate Chase* (1971) aka *Blood of the Dragon* among a few others. Before directing, she also was an Assistant Director on *The 12 Gold Medallions* (1970), one of the biggest hits of that year.

In addition to some strong performances, there are some absolutely stunning shots in the film in addition to some striking locations. In an unusual move, the bulk of this film is shot on natural settings as opposed to the usual Shaw Brothers sets that often dominate the bulk of their movies. I happen to love those studio bound movies as they add an air of fantasy and dream-like quality or as I often refer to as the *Wizard of Oz* effect. Director Ho takes full advantage of some beautiful waterfalls, majestic mountains and wind swept plains to tell his story. One of the most ambitious set pieces involves the villains burning the forest surrounding the settlement occupied by the protagonists. Rear screen projection and miniatures are utilized to enhance this elaborate sequence and serves to further the increasing villainy of the bad guys as the heroes are now forced to live in caves, the wildfire having destroyed their herb crops.

*Vengeance is a Golden Blade* (1969) is a highly recommended film for swordplay fans. Although the choreography isn't as accomplished as Chang Cheh's violent Wu Xia's of this time period, it's passable but this film's strong suit is in its characters, acting and beautiful locations. Anyone going into this film expecting a blood bath will be sorely disappointed. It does have the usual blood spurting but save for one decapitation, it's kind of tame compared with most other Shaw Brothers movies of the year. It's all about performances here and even though there is abundant, but slightly lacking sword fights, they are all shot with different locales as backdrops; whether it be the furious wildfire sequence, the mountain fight and at the enemy stronghold or the duel between Hsiao and Long Zhen Tian in a lake shoulder deep in the water, Ho Meng Hua provides lots of variety for what I feel is his finest swordplay film of his 30+ years in HK cinema

**Vengeance of a Snow Girl (Hong Kong, 1971: Lo Wei)** - Vengeance of a Snow Girl is a somewhat long winded wuxia tale that ultimately takes on a surprising poignancy. The Snow Girl seeking vengeance is played by Li Ching, not exactly physically the most formidable or fearsome of actresses. She is about as tall as a roll of Charmin and just as soft with large beseeching eyes that would make a doe cry. She began mainly as a dramatic actress and quickly acquired the nickname "Baby Queen", but with the popularity of the martial arts film all the Shaw actors were expected to pitch in and Li Ching had her share of action roles. All that said, Li Ching is quite good in this wrathful role bringing her acting chops to one of wuxia's more memorable heroines.

In the dark a red hooded figure quickly flits from roof to roof, but the eyes make clear who is behind the masked face and what the gender is (though later the not too observant kung fu men seem to think she is a man – gender recognition rarely being a learned skill in many martial arts films). She darts into the room of Ge Hong and steals one of his deadly Golden Claws thus setting in motion a standard tale of revenge but with enough twists and curiosities to make it intriguing. Since she was a young girl Bing trained with two hermits in order to gain the requisite skills to avenge the murders of her mother and father at the hands of four martial arts masters. Now she feels ready to return the favor. She is at a slight disadvantage though as she is crippled and only able to walk aided by her two jade crutches (weapons within needless to say), but her kung fu is great and she can all but fly. Visually she makes a lethal looking killer – walking crab like she appears monstrous in her hate and at times when director Lo Wei speeds up her crooked walk she has a certain Ju-on quality about her.

Ten years previously Ximen Chong (Lee Kwan), Tong Hong (Ku Feng), Ge Hong (Wong Chung-shun) and Gao Yun (Tien Peng) demanded that Bing's father turn over the Jade Phoenix Sword to them for safekeeping and upon his refusal they kill him and his wife. In the shadows this is witnessed by Bing as she submerges herself for hours in ice

cold water to both escape and to protect the sword— this turns out to badly damage her legs. Now in an explosion of hatred she wants blood. One of the three killers Gao Yun feels great guilt for his actions and sympathizes with his would-be killer and further complications arise when one of his son's (Yueh Hua) falls hard for Bing (after first thinking she was a he). Gao tells his son that she can be healed – but as in all wuxia stories it won't be easy – she has to go to a mystical snow field with a hot water spring – but she will be instantly frozen to death unless she has a magical pearl that resides inside a volcano with her – but she will burn to death in the volcano unless she is wearing heat resistant armour (looking amazingly like asbestos suits) that is the property of a Prince. The journey begins even knowing that when she can walk no one will be a match for her killing skills. Meanwhile, Tong Hong and his spoiled daughter (Chiao Chiao) are after Bing and the Jade Phoenix. Good production values and some great location shooting, the film could have used a little better editing and some better action choreography but it's the plot rather than the action that makes this a satisfying outing. Btw – keep an eye out for Sammo in red as one of Tong's henchmen.

**Vengeful Beauty, The (Hong Kong, 1977: Ho Meng Hua)** - Flying guillotines were obviously popular in the seventies giving rise not only to a direct sequel to the original Chen Kwan Tai film but also this spin off.

Chan Ping plays the vengeful beauty of the title; Qiu-Yan, the wife of an imperial guard who suspects the emperor's involvement in the recent spate of decapitations that have been plaguing the capital. The first film established that it is indeed the emperor's secret troupe of assassins that are removing political opponents and this film builds on the premise. When Qiu-Yan becomes too nosy, the 'Flying Guillotines' are despatched to kill him and his entire family but Qiu-Yan escapes; 2 months pregnant.

Lo Lieh, as the leader of the assassin squad (presumably having taken over from Ku Feng who died in the original film) assures the emperor that there are no survivors and then makes it his life's mission to track Qiu-Yan down before the emperor finds out different. Qiu-Yan goes into hiding but also finds help from two other political exiles played by Yueh Hua and Tsui Siu Keung.

The flying guillotines are actually less prevalent than might be expected and any decapitations are from re-used footage from the original film. Classic kung fu choreography takes precedent here and while Chan Ping gives an adequate performance, there is pure quality from Tsui Siu Keung, Yueh Hua, Wang Lung Wei and Lo Lieh.

What marks a great kung fu film is a final showdown that still manages to surprise and impress no matter how good the preceding story. This is certainly one of those.

**Victim, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Sammo Hung)** - a.k.a **Lighting Kung Fu** - Tough Martial Artist Chan Wing (Sammo Hung), is in search of a Master, to further enhance his Kung Fu skills. When he sees Chung Yau (Leung Kar-Yan) help out a villager with a run away cart, Wing is immediately impressed. He pesters and pursues Yau, asking him to teach him his unique style of self-defence. Only Wing doesn't know, that Chang Yau is in the middle of a violent family feud. With his wicked scheming older brother Jo Wing (Chang Yi) out for his blood,

Plot twists, comedy, and action galore in this Graffon film production, directed and co-choreographed by Hong Kong movie icon Sammo Hung. An old school Hong Kong Kung Fu classic, made at time when the genre was under-going a few changes. Scripted by Lau Tin-Chi, who also worked on the story for the Jackie Chan movie *The Young Master*, made the same year. This is one of those rare independent Kung Fu movies that features a decent story, to follow between the intricate scuffles. Lau also worked on the script for another classic Leung Kar Yan/ Sammo Hung collaboration, *Knockabout* (1979). He also had a small role in that production playing Banker Wie's father. The film's quirky soundtrack, was put together by another frequent Sammo Hung collaborator, veteran composer/actor Frankie Chan (*Prodigal Son*). If you look up Chan's musical C.V you will find there's not many films from 1980, that he didn't create the soundtrack for. Like Lau Tin-Chi he had also worked on the highly successful *Knockabout*.

With such an impressive team of action directors on board, the action as you can imagine is of the finest quality. Featuring former members of Bruce Lee's stunt team Billy Chan (*The Big Boss*), Peter Chan Lung (*Fist Of Fury*), Lam Ching-Ying (Mr Vampire) and Sammo himself. Not to mention contributions from Yuen Biao, who also has some minor stunt/doubling work in the movie. The first serious fight occurs when Chan Wing goes to challenge the Master, of a student he's crossed. We get treated to Grade A encounter with Sammo brandishing a three-section staff, which he uses to deflect Master Yuen Wen Shing's staff strikes. It's a short but intense encounter, that's not without its lighter moments. A running joke at the start of the film, has Chan Wing beating people. Only for them to claim he wouldn't be able to defeat their master. Which leads him to have a short but funny encounter with a Shaolin Monk played Karl Maka (*Skinny Tiger, Fatty Dragon*). Karl was also *The Victim's* producer, a role he also had in *Odd Couple* (1979) and *Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog* (1978).

Chang Yi(*Killer From Above*) is on top form as the man with the jade eye patch Jo Wing, who is sneakier than a ninja in stealth mode. Wing's father rescued a young Chang Yau from a life on the streets. Yet Jo was always jealous of his adopted brother. When the pair are grown up, Jo attempts to assault Chang future wife Yuet Yee(Fan Lei). This sparks off a bitter family feud. Chang Yi was a former student of the Beijing Opera, he studied the style for eight years in Taiwan. Getting his break in Hong Kong movies in 1967, when he joined the Shaw Brothers studio. Yi went on to have a long and successful career appearing in movies made in both Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Before I get onto the subject of the film's fight fest, of a finale. I'd like to briefly mention some of the films other action highlights. Leung Kar Yan and Sammo Hung have a great comedy fight, with Sammo trying to defend himself without hitting his master. The encounter starts inside a house and then ends up outside, where the two kick-up some more dust. At the end of it all, Sammos character looks like he's had his face rubbed in a bee's nest. When Chang Yau goes to see his dying father, it's not long until he's having to use his kung fu skills again. The scene where he uses a staff to fend off Jo Wing's lackeys, features a great display of Leung Ka Yans weapons skills. Along with some equally amazing moves from the stuntmen, who show some great timing. To top things off, Leung Kar Yan carries Fan Lei, while fending off the villains after ditching the wooden staff.

*"Hey fatso, keep your nose out of this"*

Now let's have a look at the movies big showdown, set at Jo Wing's villa. Leung Kar Yan is now inside the house, he is face to face with his arch enemy. Wing's axe wielding lackeys struggling to get into the room. The sound of them rattling a jammed door, builds the tension as the two fighters have a stare down. Then there's a flurry of blows and counters and the finale kicks off literally. Wing dives through a wooden panel to evade his opponent. When our hero catches up with him, he's faced with another fighter Tong Wai Shing (Wilson Tong). Wilson Tong's role might only be minor one here, but he delivers his usual classy Martial Arts performance. Watching Tong here, makes it easy to see why he was referred to as the Foot Doctor.

Tong Wai Shing is not the only force Chang Yau must contend with, he still has-to deal with the hatchet club. You get a real sense of rhythmic power from Leung Kar Yan's physical performance. With him battering people left right and centre, he's much more restrained here than in *Thundering Mantis*. That said, he only just appears to be holding onto his sanity. The four choreographers really delivered the goods in the final fights of the movie. It holds up against anything that Golden Harvest or Shaw Brothers were putting out at the time.

The use of wires to enhance the impact of some moves, is done really-effectively here. When Chang Yau confronts Jo Wing for the second time, Wing gives him a brutal kick, sending him reeling hard against the villas wooden doors. This isn't enough to stop him and he continues to fight on. You can see Sammo Hung's influence with some nice acrobatics thrown into the mix too. Not to mention some fancy looking flying head scissors. It's no surprise Leung Kar Yan was exhausted after filming the films closing moments. When Chang Yau stops for a brief respite, Wing ups the ante and takes things to another level. Bombarding the hero of the story with a relentless attack. With Yau resulting to an old Western bar room brawl move, the stool to the head trick. This steady's him enough, for things to even up a little. This month theme being greatest finales, I couldn't resist re-visiting this amazing Martial Arts film.

Special mention should go to the talented stunt team, who really bring the action to life. This movie is a classic in my opinion, and it's not just the finale that deserves praise. There's a lot of I've overlooked in this review, the bath house sequence for one. There's also a terrific supporting cast behind the stars. It would have been nice to see Sammo involved in the final scenes, but he still gets a good amount of screen time. He was the director after all, and I guess he wanted to spend more time behind the camera for the last section of the story. Actress Fan Lei puts on a strong performance as Chang Yau's wife Yuet Yee. Unfortunately- she doesn't have any Martial Arts related scenes, but Lei is a great addition to the cast.

**Wandering Dragon (Taiwan, 1978: Ulysses Au, Lin Chi-Jan) – aka A Kung Fu Man, the Wanderer - 1978** "Wandering Dragon" or "A Kungfuman, the Wanderer" from Taiwan with Pai Ying, Sek Fung, Miao Tan, Wong Goon-Hung and the ladies include - Elsa Yeung Wai-San, Tien Wah, Cheng Fei-Fei, and Chiang Ching-Hsia.

This is a mighty fine martial arts comedy. I am watching every martial arts movie ever made in chronological order from the golden era 1967 to 1984. 1978 was likely the most prolific of all these years. Many of these movies are still famous by title alone (*The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*). Some are famous not because of excellence because of how terrible they are (almost any movie from 1978 with Bruce Lee's name in the title). Many more have never been seen by more than a few thousand fans and likely never will be seen by any more (and the world is a better place because of that).

Then there is this movie. It is well done from start to finish and a hard core fan like me never even heard of it before I started my project. I rate this movie as an 8 out of 10 overall and I also rate it as one of the best martial arts movies of 1978. It has a simple story line – some folks are just not interested in martial arts. That is the hero of this movie. Sek Feng's character simply states "We all have our own lives". His dad forces him to learn martial arts to no avail. Then he tries other methods such as sending him to live with monks, Taoist priests, and even becoming a scholar. But Sek Keng just doesn't fit in yet never gives up his attitude of tolerance and acceptance. It was such a relief to enjoy a character like that for a change rather than the dozens of stereotypes found in these movies. The humor is mostly lowbrow and physical but is really funny except for the parts where it continues even though the joke ended. The pacing and editing are perfect, the story flows smoothly never once is the fast forward button even considered. For an added bonus the girls are really hot too and show more than average amount of skin without total nudity.

Of course the fights are good. Every fight is above average with good choreography and staging, there is uniqueness and character to each fight and most of all every move is executed with above average power, focus and speed.

I am putting all fans of martial arts movies on notice that this movie is mandatory viewing and you have my promise that you will also find it above average.

**War of Shaolin Temple, The (Taiwan, 1980: David Lin)** - When a young rebel steals an imperial seal he seeks refuge in Shaolin temple where he hones his martial arts skills. It isn't long before the Manchus show up, led by Alan Hsu, and all manner of Wu-Shu inspired madness ensues. With action very much like that seen in Jet Li's Shaolin Temple series but also mixed with the intricate stylings of choreography genius Alan Hsu, this should appeal to all fans of kung fu movies.

Plot and character development are purely adequate for this type of film but the martial arts on display are a few notches above average. The Shaolin temple setting provides much opportunity for training sequences and the perfect showcase for lead star's (not sure who he is) skills. Credited on some releases as Jet Li 2 (?!!), the comparisons are actually quite deserved as the lead shows amazing skill and agility. Mark Long is also highly impressive as the High Abbott but Alan Hsu is probably the best thing about the film as he provides a wonderfully villainous turn.

One of the most inspired scenes comes about half way when the hero meets the mad drunken monk (Chai Kai; a strange character who spends his days in a cave practicing kung fu and mixing different blends of wine. The combination of acrobatics and martial arts techniques in this scene is quite astounding.

The film culminates in an extended showdown between the Shaolin monks and the Manchus which is in a similar vein, and of similar quality, to the endings of Jet Li's first two Shaolin Temple movies. With mainland martial artists showing off their Wu Shu skills and Mark Long and Alan Hsu throwing all manner of intricate shapes, it's an ending that's full of variety and fast moving action.

**Warrior from Shaolin (Hong Kong, 1980: Lau Kar-Wing)** - aka **Carry on Wise Guy** - Liu Chia-hui shocks the world by starring as a Shaolin monk, a role nearly as rare for him as "thuggish villain" is for Wang Lung-wei.

Set during World War II, Liu's character is given a secret map by a dying rebel fighting the occupying forces from Japan. The monk is pestered by a couple petty criminals who think he is carrying a treasure map instead of a strategic one, and to make things even more of a pain as he tries to reach the rebel headquarters to deliver the map, the Japanese have all sorts of gun-toting toadies running after him.

It's a variation on a theme, of course. There are plenty of movies in which Shaolin Monks help rebels fight the Ch'ing soldiers of the final dynasty, but it's rare that you see Shaolin monks fighting during World War II. I would guess it's mainly because World War II isn't very funny, especially for China. If you need evidence of the fact that World War II wasn't funny, just watch Hogan's Heroes.

To be honest, there really isn't a whole lot to this film. It's simple and straight-forward, with very few diversions along the way, which is more than can be said for Liu Chia-hui's trek in the film. However, don't let the simplicity fool you. Sometimes, kungfu works best in it's most simple form, free of frills and posturing. Warrior from Shaolin is plenty good, though it's not the best work by director Liu Chia-yung or his adopted little brother, Liu Chia-hui. Considering the filmography of each man, however, even on a bad day they do good work. And Warrior from Shaolin has plenty of good stuff going on in it, not least of which is Liu Chia-hui's goofy straw hair and floppy brown hat disguise. But he has to wear it so no one will think he's a monk. Instead they will think he's just some deranged hillbilly.

Great martial arts and acting highlight this fine kungfu fare. Liu Chia-hui may look silly in his floppy brown hat and straw hair, but that doesn't stop him from kicking some serious evil boo-tay. As usual, Liu Chia-yung himself shows up to give everyone who acts heroic a hard time.

This one recently got an el cheapo re-release here in the states and part of one on ten million "Shaolin Collections" to come out in the past year. It's worth picking up, though the old Ocean Shores tape looks much better if you can find it.

**Warriors Two (Hong Kong, 1978: Sammo Hung)** - The other Leung Jan/Wing Chun/Sammo Hung movie. Of course most of you reading this will already be familiar with the synopsis and characters of this classic. But in case you're not.....

Korean kicking ace Cassanova Wong plays casier hua. Hua over hears a businessman named Mo(Fung Hark On) and his henchmen talking about a plot to kill the Alderman and take over the town. Hua immediatley goes to warn the Alderman of the plot, but the Alderman's aid that Hua reports it to (comic boney bastard Dean Shek) happens to be secretley working for Mo and sets Hua up to be murdered. Hua manages to survive the ambush within an inch of his life and is taken by his friend (Sammo Hung) to his master, Doctor Leung Jan (real life wing chun legend played by Leung Kar Yan who gives his finest ever performance in a role he was born to play - despite never having formely learned wing chun himself before the movie). And the Alderman does get killed, Mo gets his way and takes over the town. Meanwhile, Hua is staying at Doctor Leung Jan's residence until he makes a full recovery. When Mo learns of this he has Hua's mother killed in a bid to lure Hua out, but Ya Chun (Sammo) won't let him leave for his protection. Sammo and Hua then pester Leung Jan to take Hua as a student. Leung Jan is reluctant but after sometime decides to take him on. The movie then shows some awesome training sequences. Meanwhile Mo learns of the threat of Hua knowing about him and of Leung Jans excellence in kung fu and sets a deadly ambush to get him murdered. Then it is up to Hua, Ya Chun and Chin Feng (Ya Chun's sister) to take revenge and finally put a stop to Mo and his cronies. The final 32 minutes of the movie is almost non-stop fighting.

Warriors Two is Sammo Hungs masterpiece. The movie is similar in story and structure to Sammo's debut feature the Iron Fisted monk. But this is on a whole other level above his debut. It has just the right balance in the story so you never get tempted to fast forward or divert your attention. It has humor, drama, brutal violence, awesome training sequences and awesome fight choreography. Before Warriors Two, wing chun had never been displayed so in-depth before (though you will see wing chun being conveyed in shaw movies *Shaolin Martial Arts* and *Invincible Shaolin*). The training sequences are reminiscent of those in shaw bros's shaolin movies, indeed the influences of shaw movies on this is quite obvious.

This is as good as kung fu movies get in my opinion and is my 2nd favorite movie of all time. From 1978 until the end of the 'old skool' kung fu movie era the best movies were being made by Yuen Woo Ping, Lau Kar Leung and Sammo Hung. I consider Sammo's to be the top of the heap at that time with classic after classic such as *Warriors Two*, *Knockabout*, *The Victim*, *Encounters of the Spooky Kind* and *The Prodigal Son*. Sure Woo Ping and Master Lau were producing classics too. But is it the general consensus with us fans that *Warriors Two* is as much a bona-fide classic as *Drunken Master* and *36th Chamber of Shaolin*?

**Water Margin, The (Hong Kong, 1972: Chang Cheh)** – **Seven Blows of the Dragon** - Having not read the source and frankly being way too overwhelmed with the massive amount of fellows and ladies in the Liang Shan bandit clan to dare attempt it, I finally got through this one a little while ago. From the Chang Cheh perspective, *The Water Margin* boils down to two men who trained under the same master (Mr. Lu and Master Shih) who are on opposing sides of the law. Shih works for -surprise- the corrupt government, while Lu eventually sides with the bandits after his cheating wife tries to get rid of Mr. Lu for harboring Liang Shan outlaws.

John Chiang plays the sprightly prodigy Yen Xiaoyi (Yen Ching) who can outwrestle, outflute and outlove just about anyone else. Chiang shows off a lot of his stunt man beginnings in his seemingly endless array of flips, somersaults and wrestling-type tosses. To prove what a hip cat Xiaoyi is, he gets a weird scat-song cha cha cha vocal to back him up whenever he does something cool. After leaving his flute groupies for more important matters (saving his master and true brotherhood), Xiaoyi becomes one of the Liang Shan, thereby saving Mr. Lu, his adopted pop.

All along the way we meet Ku Feng, Wang Chung (as a brash Lo Meng type - who survives), a dashing lass who plays Lady Hu and a cameo by Ti Lung's now groovy-looking fake monk era Wu Song. The ever awesome Wu unleashes



yet another new lethal kick - the Mandarin Duck kick. And it looks like being on the receiving end of this double kick is seven shades of painful. I had to stop the dvd player and replay that because I wasn't sure if I read the subtitles correctly, especially since I'm hungry. Mandarin Duck kick is a real style used in Mantis kung fu. Note to self: ~~(see what happens when you have no new Chan Wai Man to watch)~~, the more unreal the kung fu style sounds, the stronger the possibility it is real. Alas, it appears that Jade Chain Steps is a made up style.

Darn it, Pops, Lau Kar Wing and Tong Gai! You ruined my comedic ramble about do ducks even kick?

I guess I'm pleased ~~(cabin-crazy)~~ to report I finally made it through this movie. I won't dare attempt *All Men Are Brothers* tonight... I'm afraid I might miss a third day of work if I do.

To somewhat salvage this review, *The Water Margin* isn't bad when you get to the focus of this particular film (apparently it's taken from a few chapters deep into the novel.) It's not great either, but the contemporary musical cues and manners from Xiaoyi are kind of bizarre.

**Way of the Dragon (Hong Kong, 1973: Bruce Lee) - aka Return of the Dragon** - You can't overstate the impact Bruce has had on modern pop culture. Stars have come and gone, names like Jackie Chan, Clint Eastwood, and Jet Li are all familiar marquee names, but Bruce exists above all of them. Take a walk down any street in New York and you will see half a dozen shops with some sort of Bruce Lee merchandise. T-shirts, posters, scrolls, black velvet paintings, statues, action figures, movies — pretty much anything. I even saw one of those blacklight posters featuring the “holy trinity” of Bruce Lee, Jimi Hendrix, and Bob Marley. And these aren't just kungfu film specialty stores or Chinatown curiosity shops. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, whites, Dominicans, Chinese, Vietnamese, you name it and their culture has embraced The Dragon. No other action film star occupies the spot Bruce has obtained in our society. He is a modern day Greek hero, a Jason or Perseus, a man whose legend has grown to epic proportions. So, the obvious question from many people is “Why Bruce Lee?” What was it about this brash, good-looking young guy that made him such a phenomenon? Why Lee and not Ti Lung? Why Lee and not anyone else in the world? The answer is equal parts timing, skill, charm, and mystery.

Bruce hit the scene at a time when a lot of people in both Hong Kong and the United States were desperate for an underdog hero, especially one who wasn't white. The world was gorged on James Bond rip-offs and sanitized Westerns full of chiseled white guy good looks. The Vietnam War, Civil Rights movement, the Native American awareness movements that became things like the Wounded Knee siege — all these cultural elements were combining in an explosive wave of disillusionment with the way things used to be. The urban communities in America, who were hit especially hard by both the Vietnam War (since so many soldiers were minorities) and the frustration faced by the Civil Rights movement. With real-life heroes like Martin Luther King Jr. being gunned down, people were looking for heroes somewhere. Up until then Hollywood hadn't been providing them with anything.

Then came Bruce Lee. It's no coincidence that Lee hit the scene around the same time that black action stars like Fred Williamson, Richard Roundtree, and Pam Grier were starting to make a big impact on the scene. People were fed up with Bond and John Wayne. They wanted someone more modern, more bad-ass, and most importantly, they wanted someone to whom they could relate. Bruce wasn't white. He wasn't big. His characters were not rich or influential or successful. He was an everyman for all other men who could not see themselves in the previous set of American heroes. He was different, and he was the underdog.

In each of Lee's characters, there was plenty for the disillusioned to identify with. The condescension and racism hurled at him in *Fist of Fury*, having to take shit from a corrupt boss in *Big Boss* — there were things people recognized, and things people loved seeing Lee overcome. His biggest film in the United States, *Enter the Dragon* was a wild James Bond type action-adventure film where the Asian was the hero rather than a silly sidekick or devious villain. It was also a movie where the black character (Jim Kelly) is a noble and heroic man of principle, while the white guy (John Saxon) is a sleaze. A lovable sleaze, but a sleaze never the less.

Bruce Lee gave people hope, goofy as that might sound, that they too could overcome the odds facing them in everyday life. They could rise above the poverty and hopelessness of their situation. When Lee died under mysterious circumstances, it cemented his place not just as a star, but as a legend. His mark on society, from his face on a t-shirt to the popularity of martial arts training as a way to cope with growing up in the inner city, will remain in place long after the names of hundreds of other stars have been forgotten.

So which of these films should be the first Bruce Lee film we review? His biggest, *Enter the Dragon*? How about his first, *Big Boss*? Or the one most everybody considers his best, *Fist of Fury* (aka *Chinese Connection*). I think we've explained the whole *Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury*, *Chinese Connection* thing, but just in case you forgot, here's the deal: when Bruce Lee's Hong Kong films were brought over to the US to capitalize on the success of *Enter the Dragon*, someone screwed up and got the titles confused. *Big Boss*, Lee's first film, was mislabeled *Fist of Fury*. Realizing the blunder too late to fix it, distributors took the actual *Fist of Fury* (Lee's second, and many say best) and retitled it

Chinese Connection, probably to capitalize on the success of French Connection as well as Lee. Since they were on a roll, they decided to also retitle Way of the Dragon, calling it Return of the Dragon and marketing it as a sequel to Enter the Dragon despite the fact that it was made before that film.

But that brings us to where we want to be, which is the movie we've chosen to be the first Bruce Lee film we review. We chose it because it seems to slip through the cracks a lot, and because it's the only complete film that was written, directed, and choreographed by Lee himself. It's an excellent movie that allows Lee to showcase not just his incredible martial arts skill, but also his ability as an actor. Most people like to write Lee off as a one-trick pony, perhaps the best martial artist to ever live but a pretty rigid actor. Those people obviously go along with hearsay rather than actually investigating the matter themselves. People who claim Lee could only act enraged and couldn't handle comedy should pay closer attention to this film, in which Lee gets to shine as a comedian as well as an all-around kungfu bad-ass. Bruce even gets to do stuff that results in that "wah wah waaaahhhh" comedy music!

We begin at an airport in beautiful Roma — that's Rome to you non-cosmopolitan types out there. Bruce, playing Tang Long, is something of a country bumpkin from the rural land outside Hong Kong. Right away, Lee is great at invoking a sense of sympathy for his character. I mean, we all know Lee is the baddest man to ever walk the planet, but he plays his scenes here so realistically awkward and embarrassed that you feel bad yet amused for his fish-out-of-water character. He goes to an airport lounge and, not being able to read the menu, end sup ordering about six bowls of soup. Of course, he is still Bruce Lee, so he saves face by finishing them all, which allows him to launch a series of "must go to the toilet" jokes that will be a sure-fire comedy hit with the kids for years to come.

Lee also mines comedy gold in the "goofy effeminate guy with bad toupee" department. Bruce was, in fact, a huge fan of the Dean Martin – Jerry Lewis comedy team and the many films they did together. While Bruce's sense of humor is not quite as slapstick (and far less annoying) than Jerry Lewis, you can still see the influence it had on him. The main difference here is that Bruce is both the goofy, out-of-place Jerry Lewis and the suave, competent Dean Martin, depending on what the situation called for. Bruce definitely had a lot more depth than people gave him credit for.

After the soup skit, Bruce meets up with his cousin, played by the lovely Nora Mao (Fist of Fury, Big Boss), his frequent co-star. Nora had written her uncle back in Hong Kong to explain that they were having a lot of trouble with thugs at the restaurant in Rome. She expected him to send a lawyer, and instead he sent Tang Long, which Nora isn't exactly happy about as Tang is ignorant of big city culture, especially in the West. Tang Long explains that, while he may be a bit dim, he can help out in other ways.

He gets to show everyone his "other ways" when the thugs show up at the restaurant to smash things up and convince the Chinese to sell their land. It's always something like that, isn't it? The Man and The Mob are always trying to build malls on land owned by kungfu schools, community centers, and restaurants. It's a tried and true film formula, but it's also a comment on gentrification. In my old neighborhood, you could make a movie about The Gap trying to buy up land belonging to community gardens and outreach centers. Same shit, different era. I think The Gap stuck mostly to financial strong-arming, though, rather than sending thugs to beat up a guy named Pops.

Realizing that the thugs, one of whom I swear is Oliver Platt, won't listen to words, Bruce decides to speak with kungfu. He thrashes them soundly in a great sequence. Great not just because Lee is so fast and crisp with his art, but also because Lee's character undergoes a wonderful transformation. When dealing with the restaurant and the city of Rome, Tang Long is lost and vulnerable. But when he steps into the back alley to beat the shit out of the no-goodniks, he immediately becomes confident and in control. Ass kicking is a universal language, after all.

In between visits by the thugs, who keep arming themselves heavier and heavier only to still get the shit kicked out of them by Bruce, the film takes full advantage of its Rome locations. Hong Kong movies that filmed outside of Hong Kong were still very rare in the 1970s, so Lee takes in as much of Rome as can be crammed into a few "travelin' all around" montages. Then it's back to the alley behind the restaurant to kick ass on some more thugs. This is a pretty weak-ass mafia, I must say. But I guess they're not the big-time guys we see in films like The Godfather. After all, those guys are controlling international drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and resort casinos. These guys are trying to muscle out a restaurant. It's sort of like how most leprechauns get to guard gold and countless treasures, but Lucky the Leprechaun has to guard a bowl of Lucky Charms cereal.

In a theme that is present in all of Lee's Hong Kong films, he teaches other Chinese — other minorities — not to be ashamed of themselves or their heritage. When he arrives in Rome, the staff at the restaurant is practicing Japanese karate because they feel Chinese martial arts are weak and embarrassing. Once they see Lee in action, however, it fills them with pride and reinvigorates their interest in their own culture. This was an important theme for a film in 1972, and it's a large part of why Bruce Lee became so popular. He fights for the right not to be ashamed of the color of your skin, and he shows that minorities can survive the pressures put on them by the established white majority. They can rise above racism by learning, relying upon, and believing in themselves.

Once the boss finally catches on that his thugs are a bunch of fat-ass losers, he hires some karateka bad-asses in the form of Bob Wall and Ing Sik-wang (Stoner, When Tae Kwan Do Strikes, Young Master). Wall is best known for his role as the right evil O'Hara in Enter the Dragon. After a while, Bruce gets sick of beating up the thugs, who just never seem to learn their lesson. So he goes to their headquarters, beats them up there, then does a very

impressive kick in which he leaps up into the air and smashes an overhead lamp, completely without the use of tricks or wires. To accomplish the same simple but impressive kick these days would require Yeun Wo-ping to use ten miles of wires, pulleys, and CGI effects.

Pissed off about their light, the thugs hire their own kungfu bad-ass in the form of Chuck Norris. I know, I know. You guys here Chuck's name and it makes you grimace and roll your eyes. Great. Now we gotta watch Lone Wolf McQuade. But take heart, li'l buckaroos. There is a vast difference between Chuck Norris the Bruce Lee opponent and Chuck Norris the Texas Ranger. For one, bash him all you want, but Chuck Norris was an amazing martial artist at his peak (which is when this movie was made, and why Bruce chose Norris). Legit martial artists and kungfu fighters all recognized Norris as possessing one of the fastest, deadliest spinning back kicks in the world. Judging Chuck's abilities based on his American films is like, well, judging Cynthia Rothrock by her American films or Sammo Hung by his work on Martial Law.

The finale sees Lee face off against Norris in the maze-like arches of the Roman Coliseum, invoking the not-so-subtle image of modern-day gladiators. The ensuing battle is one of the best kungfu one-on-ones ever filmed, with the Benny Urquidez – Jackie Chan fight in *Wheels On Meals* being a distant second. Part of why the fight between Norris and Lee is so great is because it hurts. In 1972, kungfu film choreography was still pretty basic outside of Lee's films, and a lot of the over-choreographed fights, while looking spectacular, lacked any sense of injury or power, especially when the guys would hit each other over and over with no real sign of damage.

When Lee and Norris hit each other, you can feel it. Their blows carry weight, and the weight shows. It's obviously a result of two legitimate martial arts bad-asses being involved rather than two guys trained in Peking Opera, dance, or stage fighting. Of course, despite all the flesh-pounding-flesh action, the most painful scene comes when Lee uses Norris' thick, Piltown Man-esque coating of body hair (it's possible he was one of the cavemen laughing at farts I talked about earlier) as a weapon, ripping out a big chunk of chest hair (he could have used a little off the back as well). Of course, ripping out a man's chest hair makes you bad, but then proceeding to blow it into the man's face makes you bad-ass. It's the little things, you see.

There's some end-of-the film shenanigans after the fight before Lee wraps everything up and heads back to Hong Kong. The film is absolutely superb. Lee shines as both an actor and a fighter, and his skill and charm should be more than enough to win over pretty much anyone. Watching this movie, you'll have little question left in your mind why Lee has become so celebrated by so many different types of people. One could even take the Civil rights slogan "We Shall Overcome," and apply it to the work of Bruce Lee.

Bruce's direction is good. Nothing overly inventive or unique, but more than competent for a first-time director. It's a bit raw at times, though he really shines at filming the fight scenes, which probably shouldn't come as much of a surprise. Sammo Hung, in many ways a student and master of Bruce Lee's, would be the one director more than any of the others who would realize Lee's ambitions in filming and directing kungfu films. What Lee began in *Way of the Dragon* and never finished in *Game of Death*, Sammo would carry to fruition in films like *Knockabouts*, *Prodigal Son*, and *Project A*. Makes you wonder what the "Three Brothers" of Sammo, Yuen Biao, and Jackie Chan would have been like if it had been four brothers, and one of them was Bruce Lee.

*Way of the Dragon*, aside from being some of Lee's finest stuff, is notable for launching the film career of Chuck Norris as well. I don't actually know if this is a good thing, but I guess it was good for Chuck. He went on after this film to play a bigger role in another Hong Kong actioner, *Slaughter in San Francisco*, aka *Yellow-Faced Tiger*. That movie gave him ample opportunity to throw back his head and laugh in an evil fashion while he stood with arms akimbo. He also got to kick people. From there, it was the big-time, as he went on to play heroes in one crappy film after another, thus endearing him to the American public. If you have to watch any Chuck Norris film besides *Way of the Dragon*, make sure it's *The Octagon*, because that at least has some ninjas in it.

Chuck Norris and Bob Wall would reunite many years later to make the film *Hero and the Terror*, and even later to appear as themselves in *Sidekicks*, a film best left undiscussed. Bruce, of course, went on to make *Enter the Dragon*, the film that would become his ladder to the realm of modern-day legend and launch the kungfu craze in America. Lee's contributions to the genre are sundry. He gave it its banner star. He gave it the refinement of fight choreography, which up until Lee had been stiff and stage-like. He gave it comedy and heart. He gave it international appeal. He gave it Bruce Lee. A man full of anxieties, flaws, genius, ambition, fear, and fearlessness. A man whose name and face would become ubiquitous.

**Ways of Kung Fu (Taiwan, 1978: Lee Chiu) - aka Martial Arts of Shaolin** - Ta Kung (Chi Kuan-Chun) is a constant target for practical jokes and harassment by his fellow students at a Buddhist temple. After a scar-faced monk named Wu Tak (Cliff Ching) arrives, the abuse becomes more pronounced and Ta is urged by the head monk to leave and join his old friend Shang King (Leung Kar-Yan), a master of kung fu. After Ta Kung witnesses Shang's ability, he agrees that he wants to learn his style in order to defend himself in the future. After two years, Ta Kung returns to the temple to find that the head monk is sick and Wu Tak has taken over, all while murdering and robbing people at night. Ta Kung confronts him and is almost defeated, but is saved by Shang King at the last moment, where it is

revealed that Shang and Wu have met and fought before. Later Wu Tak and his thugs attacks Shang King's family, but Shang's daughter (Wong Bo-Yuk) manages to escape and get back to Ta Kung. After another battle, Ta escapes and is taken in by a Drunken Master (Yu Tien-Lung) and his disciple (Meng Fei), who train him to eventually take on Wu Tak and end his reign of terror.

Ways of Kung Fu for the most part is a mediocre film with some flashes of brilliance. Unfortunately, the storyline is very disjointed and introduces characters and side plots seemingly in random spots. Characters that seem to have an important role that should be explained by the end fade away without much thought. Specifically, the role of the Drunken Master and his pupil seem to be afterthoughts created to show a different style on film. Chi Kuan doesn't actually incorporate drunken style in any fight, so its presence is a bit confusing. Add to this the haphazard role of what appears to be a policeman played by Chung Wa who is searching for Cliff Ching's character for past deeds. Again, no explanation is ever given for this side-plot. I'm probably being too picky on plot points in a kung fu movie, but it adds to the overall sloppiness of the film. The one true highlight is the presence of Leung Kar-Yan in his role as the grumpy old kung fu master. There is one top-notch fight scene where he takes on Chi Kuan in the rain. Kar-Yan is holding an umbrella and says that if a single rain drop touches his head, he loses the fight. Although the quality of the DVD made for some less than ideal contrast ratios (the scene takes place at night), the fighting is incredible. Kar-Yan uses the umbrella as both a shield and a staff in fantastically choreographed fight. Not surprisingly, when Leung Kar-Yan exits the picture the movie suffers immeasurably. The rest of the combatants, save for Chi Kuan, are not at the level of Kar-Yan, and the film slips back into the average bin.

**We Are Going to Eat You (Hong Kong, 1981: Tsui Hark)** - As a movie it's hard to describe, which seems to be the case of everyone else who's seen it as well. Not an all out kung-fu movie, not an all out horror movie, definitely not an all out comedy, yet it contains all three elements in some form or another.

It's truly a movie which has one step in the future and one step in the past, a lot of Hark's quirky and unique traits are already in place - from the main character simply being referred to as 'Agent 999', to an excellent musical score which ranges from traditional Chinese music, to wild tribal chants, to psychedelic assaults on the ears...the music is a great contributing factor to the feel of things.

On the other hand, a look at the key players list makes this look like a really old school affair. Produced by none other than Ng See Yuen and partly choreographed by Corey Yuen, with a cast consisting of Norman Chu, Eddie Ko, & Melvin Wong. People could be forgiven for thinking they were in for a classic kung-fu affair.

For those that haven't seen it, the chain smoking, trilby hat wearing Agent 999 (Norman Chu) is sent to a remote island to try to find a wanted criminal called Rolex (Melvin Wong). Little does he know that the island has become a law unto itself, lead by a slightly unhinged military jacket wearing dictator like figure (Eddie Ko) who has helped the whole population develop a taste for human flesh. Essentially any stranger who stumbles across them is seen as the next meal, as fresh meat seems to be in short supply, and this is achieved through groups of mask wearing, meat cleaver wielding hunters tracking and killing the victims.

The islanders themselves are a who's who of weird looking Hong Kong actors at the time, with the towering Siu Gam putting in a particularly disturbing turn as the homosexual transvestite determined to get anyone she/he comes across out of their clothes. While it sounds comical, the scenes are actually quite unsettling!

Of course, there is kung-fu, with Norman Chu being front and center of some great one versus many scenes, all involving him and hordes of the murderous butchers with their meat cleavers and masks, which gives the scenes that extra element of impact. The gore is also there as well, although not really in your face by today standards, there's a fair few fight scenes which end with a meat cleaver in the head...and some gruesome scenes in the slaughter house, but nothing too shocking.

All in all I really enjoyed 'We're Going to Eat You', it's a mish mash of genres which makes it difficult to classify, but it's an enjoyable ride with a few surprises along the way. I'm wondering what everyone else's opinion of this movie on here is?

**Web of Death (Hong Kong, 1976: Chor Yuan)** - When the '5 Venoms Clan' realise that its own secret (and magic) weapon (the 5 Venom Spider) is far too dangerous to risk falling into the wrong hands, the artifact is hidden in a secret underground chamber. A hundred years later and a senior clan member (Lo Lieh) seeks to locate the spider for his own ends. However he has no more idea as to its whereabouts than anyone else (apart from the clan leader

of course) and tries to manipulate the other rival clans into finding it for him.

By spreading the word that the spider has been found again, Lo Lieh creates much unrest amongst the various sects who each despatch their best men to track the spider down. Yueh Wah plays one such clan member; a swordsman from Wu Dong mountain sent out to retrieve the spider before it falls into evil hands which of course, and rather inevitably, it does.

The film is immediately striking with its colourful soundstage sets that create that fantasy-like quality of many of Chor Yuan's films. While action does feature at regular intervals it is not really the key focus of the film; rather its the intrigue, story and character development that takes the viewer through numerous plot twists. Lo Lieh overshadows just about everybody else in the cast with his larger than life villainy (even Ku Feng who only has a small supporting role) but Yueh Wah makes a believable hero type.

The action that does feature is largely swordplay with very little hand to hand fighting. It's well crafted, with choreography from Tong Gai, but never quite hits the high mark of other films. After having now seen so many of these Chor Yuan wuxia flicks I'm probably starting to get a bit jaded and while I certainly enjoyed it, I found it difficult to find anything too groundbreaking.

**When Taekwondo Strikes (Hong Kong, 1973: Huang Feng)** - Apart from the impressive looking introduction Angela Mao Ying does not show up until almost 25 minutes into the film though she is certainly the star of the film along with Jhoon Rhee. This is the only major acting appearance of the venerable "Father of Taekwondo" and I certainly was surprised to see him. This movie ranks in between the similar anti-Japanese films of Angela Mao and Wong Fung in *Hapkido* and *Lady Whirlwind* (both of these are also available from Shout! in a release I recommend). The anti-Japanese sentiment is the worst aspect of the film with the basic revenge plot being rather banal. Set in Korea (filmed in South Korea) this takes place during the time of Japanese occupation which coincidentally is the era in which Jhoon Rhee was born. The fight choreography from Sammo Hung and Chan Chuen is solid and is the highlights of the film though it helps when you have fighters like Whang In-shik, Carter Wong and Angela Mao. If you are looking for storyline or Japanese who are portrayed as humans then you will need to look elsewhere.

Shout! Factory's *The Angela Mao Ying Collection*: The print from the R1 is worn has a certain amount of flicker throughout, but I doubt you are going to find a better copy. It comes with both the Mandarin and English dub (sounds original.) The back of the case lists these both as 5.1. The English subtitles are not dubtitles. It also comes with a trailer (3:52).

- Add this to the pantheon of bad hairdos in the cinematic life of Sammo Hung.
- It looks like lots of hand-held camerawork was used. This allows some interesting angles. I've come to hate most handheld these days because of the overemphasis of shakiness.
- Another appearance of the Japanese Hitler/Jordan/Chaplin mustache.
- The use of Manchuria definitely dates this film (that and the use of electric lights 😊).
- Angela Mao's acting has definitely improved since I have seen her in *Lady Whirlwind*.
- Ann Winton's only acting role. Her kicks are good though her punches and combinations need work (not faulting her as she is not an actor.)
- Seriously everyone but the Japanese are good, even the French.
- There is more Christian symbolism here than in a John Woo film. There is a pretty fun scene where Chin Yuet-sang backs down from the priest because of a zen-like look he gives.
- How awesome is Whang In-shik? He performs so well you start wondering how he can lose.

**Whiplash (Hong Kong, 1974: Ting Shan-Hsi)** - In attempting to locate and watch some of the films of the fighting femmes of the sixties and seventies it is often necessary to watch many of these films without sub-titles. This clearly detracts from many of these films, but they can still be rewarding depending on certain factors – action, cinematography, locales etc. I must confess to often finding myself fast-forwarding through parts with lengthy dialogue in particular when the actor I am interested in is not involved. I am just prefacing this because this was the fact with this film and a few others that I am hoping to review in the near future.

This film stars Cheng Pei Pei who I liked so much in the classic *Come Drink with Me*. Here she is the daughter of a missing man who owns an inn that is seemingly in the middle of nowhere. She is by herself at the inn when seven men attack her for reasons that were not very clear to me. The fight is very good as Pei Pei utilizes various weapons to fend them off. Finally a cease-fire is called.

Later that night around a campfire, Pei Pei performs a wonderful dance/song/drum playing number for the men. Pei Pei was a trained dancer and this strange interlude in the film is quite a treat. She wears such a huge smile on her face while dancing that I couldn't help but think that dance must have been her real love. Of course there is not much else for her to smile about in a film that becomes increasingly more downbeat as it goes on. Pei Pei sings and dances the men into a deep sleep and when they awaken they find themselves tied to one another. No nothing kinky being planned by Pei Pei; instead she forces them to walk to a series of caves far into the mountains where she knew her father had planned to go.

Once they reach the caves she unties them and they immediately attack her. It also soon appears that there are other individuals already at the cave who are willing to kill to keep people from discovering what is in the cave. All of this leads to a showdown that gets very down, dirty, brutal and deadly by the end.

Taking into account that I really had no idea what was going on in this film, I still enjoyed it for the most part. Primarily for Pei Pei of course. She has a number of action scenes – some with knife, whip or crossbow – but others that are hand to hand. Her martial arts skills are fairly minimal, but due to her dancing background she is very fluid and has amazing leg flexibility and extension. This just makes watching her a pleasure. She also has an opportunity to do some acting here and she seems to quite get into it.

**White Butterfly Killer (Taiwan, 1973: Hou Cheng)** - Pretty impressed with this 1973 Taiwanese indie (some sources say its release date was in 1976 but I know of two Cinemart ads published in '73). Normally, its hit-or-miss with these low budget films but this one had some really nice "atmosphere." Lots of average swingy-arm fu but what made this flick good was the story itself (gasp).

Hsu Feng plays the cold-blooded hotel owner (White Butterfly Inn) who was raped several years earlier. When the thugs frequent her establishment, she methodically plots out her revenge by taking them out one at a time - even playing them against one another. The soundtrack is not your average stolen sound bites from a Hollywood pic either. Whoever composed it, did a good job helping to enhance the mood of the scenes.

Again the fu was average but overall it was a well rounded production in terms of enjoyment. HKCM seems to have the wrong "Wong Yu" listed in the cast though. Its not the comedic actor of Shaw Brother's fame who passed away in 2008 but instead this Wong Yue.

**Wild Panther (Taiwan, 1984: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Modern action film from Taiwan starring Chen Shan, Don Wong Tao and Eagle Han Ying as the villain. Chen Shan plays an ex-Special Forces guy who now has a family in South Korea and owns a boutique with one of his female colleagues. Eagle Han Ying plays a Vietnamese criminal who's killing members of his team trying to find your typical name list McGuffin.

According to the IMDB, this film was a Category I (like a G or PG) film. That's weird, when you consider the brutal treatment of the film's female characters (torture, rape, beatings, shootings, etc.) and the general violence of the subject. Sadly, Don Wong Tao spends most of the film in an office, though he gets two short fights, including one against Chen Shan. Wong Tao gets to kick a little bit more than usual here. The action, staged by Peng Kong, mixes basher-like fighting, gunplay, explosions, and even some improbable trap-oriented action. Chen Shan doesn't impress so much here, although Eagle Han gets in some good kicks in the finale. Entertaining, but nothing great.

**Win them All (Hong Kong, 1973: Kao Pao-Shu)** - *Win Them All* is a little-known early 1970s oddity that basically comes across as a prototype for the sort of kung fu comedy that would become popular starting in 1978. While the story is typical of your early 1970s (and onward) basher-type chopsockey opus, many of the fight scenes that involve lead actress Woo Gam are played for laughs. I'm always interested in these early 70s movies that seemed to have beat *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* to the punch, despite the fact that nobody ever cites them as being influential or at least predecessors on that movie.

When the chief of security (Tien Yeh) of a town discovers that the Madam of a local casino is cheating her clients out of their money, she dispatches Iron Fingers Fan Shang (Yasuaki Kurata) to remove him from the equation. She then packs up her bags and sets up shop elsewhere. A year later, his daughter, "Fiery Phoenix" Tien Feng (Hsu Feng), is looking for the man responsible, with the help of two con artists (Woo Gam and Chan Wai-Lau). The trio have become famous bandits, which I guess would make sense. I can't expect a woman in Republic-Era China to have a

whole lot of resources, especially if she's unmarried and her dad is dead. So hooking up with these two, who spend their time cheating people \*and\* casinos, is a good way to guarantee the funds food and board. They eventually arrive in a town that is run by Boss Chen (Tien Feng), who just so happens to be pupil of Iron Fingers. The trio eventually teams up another government agent, Wen (Wong Yuen-San), and his feisty-but-useless sister (Cindy Tang), to bring down the bad guys.

I think the big problem is that there are far too many protagonists in this movie, and the antics of some (Woo Gam, Cindy Tang) end up detracting from the fight scenes of others. Take Cindy Tang, who allows herself to get captured twice by Tien Feng in almost rapid succession (she tries to fight, but anything more than one lackey is too much for her). Even in her dubbed form, Woo Gam has that sexpot-even-though-there-are-more-attractive-girls-out-there quality that Mae West possessed and helps keep the film afloat during the lulls in the action. The fights themselves are long, but the finale is disappointing in that Hsu Feng is promptly forgotten about after she takes her initial licks from Kurata and switches over to Tien Feng (re: their fight isn't shown).

The action was choreographed by Wong Wing-Sang, best known for his work on the classic *Mystery of Chess Boxing*, and Got Siu-Chung, who has one choreographer credit and a few "Presenter" credits, including the Angela Mao classic *Lady Constables*. For the most part it's pretty good, although sometimes the choreography conventions of the time limit the players. Some of Bruce Lee's influence can be seen in Wong Yuen-San's fighting in the form, with some short, quick and economical moves being performed with snap and power. However, during the latter half of the final fight, his blows become more flailly-armed than before (one could argue that the beating he's received and his fatigue is causing that). Wong, a frequent collaborator of Bruce Leung Siu-Lung, is certainly a more talented screen fighter than other early 70s staples like Jimmy Wang Yu, Pai Ying, or fellow Bruce Liang collaborator Larry Lee. He gets in a few good aerial kicks, which his contemporaries never could do. He's matched by Hsu Feng, who may not have the moves of Angela Mao, but she has the same intensity and steely-eyed glare, which helps her to sell her more simpler moves: lots of ridge hands and reverse punches in her style.

Of course, the standout is Yasuaki Kurata as the main villain. He gets three long fights, including one against Tien Yeh, another against Sit Hon, and finally the end, where he manhandles Hsu Feng before dueling with Wong Yuen-San. Kurata gets to use more aikido, with its throws, take downs, and wrist manipulation moves, than he does in most of his other movies. His kicks are a lot crisper and higher, executed with more speed and power, than Wong Yuen-San or anybody else in the cast. I find it interesting how Bruce Leung Siu-Lung claimed to have taught him how to kick at about the time they made *Call Me Dragon*, but here, a year earlier, he was already kicking as good as Bruce Lee and Angela Mao. His signature move is to jab his fingers into his opponent's face, which he does a few times. But yeah, fighting-wise, Kurata is easily the highlight of the movie, as he was wont to be in many of these early 70s flicks.

**Winged Tiger, The (Hong Kong, 1969: Shen Chiang)** - The chief of Hua Shan and the leaders of Eight Schools sends famed martial artist, Guo Jiou Ru to locate a coveted manual written by the late King of the Martial World. Split into two parts, the manual details skills to turn the practitioner into a supreme fighter. The Yin family possesses one of the books while the villainous Winged Tiger, Deng Fei has the other. In a bid to secure the manuals for himself, the King of Hades sets up his sister to marry Deng Fei. Guo, with his proficiency in ventriloquism and comparable skills to Deng Fei, is to impersonate him and infiltrate the Yin household to steal away the other manual. Much intrigue and double crosses ensue leading up to an exciting finale inside the Yin Forest.

A really well directed and enjoyable Wu Xia mystery movie. Director Shen Chiang was definitely a talented director. Some wonderful twists and turns populate the film and the subterfuge and deceptive tendencies aren't as overwhelming as you would often see in other Wu Xia movies particularly those of Chu Yuan where you sometimes would get two or three treacheries revealed in the same scene. Here, such devices compliment the film, not overwhelm it. Shen Chiang directed the excellent Wu Xia movie *The Rescue* (1971). A film that had light touches of humor and dollops of gore as well as a rare big role for Bolo Yueng. Shen also directed the average *Swordswomen Three* (1970). A passable sword picture with a good story and a very violent ending.

The lead in *Winged Tiger* (1969), Chen Hung is an unusual choice for the lead hero considering his usual bad guy roles so while watching this movie I was expecting him to feign his heroic intentions later in the film but it doesn't happen. He doesn't look the part at all but handles himself well enough. He employs his ventriloquism to great effect in a superbly crafty scene designed to turn the tables on those who wish him harm. His identity is constantly questioned and things heat up a great deal once two corpses turn up both believed to be that of the real Winged Tiger and his sidekick the Soul Sucking Kid.

With each plan the villains come up with Guo seems to have a counter for them although he slips up once resulting in his capture and near death. His charms once again allay his death a second time when he sweet talks the beautiful Yin Cai Fa to not reveal his location temporarily until his wounds heal. After making her believe he loves

her after making love, Guo uses Cai Fa's emotions to obtain the manuals but by the end, his ploy becomes real when she helps him a THIRD time after Guo is caught inside a cave replete with a trap that supposedly conceals the martial arts books within a large urn.

Tien Feng again doesn't disappoint as the villain, Master Yin, the King of Hades. Feng sometimes played good guys like *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) or *Twelve Deadly Coins* (1968) but he excels in bad guy roles with *The Sword of Swords* (1969) being probably his most supreme and veritable villain performance. The most outrageous role I've seen him in is the gore drenched excess of *Oath of Death* (1971), a film that would be remade two years later in a much more polished and amazingly, far less violent form from Chang Cheh as *The Blood Brothers* (1973).

The stunning beauty of Angela Yu Chien is on hand as the ill fated love interest for Guo who, despite being deceived on numerous occasions by him, is torn between her feelings for him and following the orders of her evil brother. There is a brief nude shot in the film but I'm sure it's not Yu Chien but a body double. she gets to fight a bit during the finale in the forest.

David Chiang has an unusual villain role here as one of the Three Officers, Bai Yun Sheng. He doesn't get to show off much but he is seen throughout the film plotting with the other rogues on what to do with Guo once he's proven to be an imposter. Chiang also got to play an imposter in Pao Hsu Lieh's film *The Imposter* (1975) where he uses various disguises to nail Chen Kuan Tai, a thuggish police captain. Chiang does nothing in *Winged Tiger* (1969) that is overly memorable and I assume he did this before he appeared in *Invincible Fist* (1969).

Muscular actor Cheng Lei was a regular in Chang Cheh's movies like his star turn alongside Jimmy Wang Yu and Lo Lieh in *The Magnificent Trio* (1966). He seldom survived to the end in his films and can be seen in supporting roles like *The Assassin* (1967), *The Anonymous Heroes* (1969), *The Heroic Ones* (1970) and *The Deadly Duo* (1971). Here, Cheng plays the Winged Tiger and at the beginning until he is intercepted by Guo. His sidekick, the Soul Sucking Kid appears for all the world like a very young Wang Li. The resemblance is striking. I don't know if it is in fact him or not but his role is brief as is Cheng Lei's and both exit the film at the same time.

A well crafted Wu Xia film with a large smattering of intrigue and twists laced with fights. Although the wirework is hit and miss, the time period must be taken into consideration. I enjoyed this one quite a bit. Recommended for any swordplay fan.

**Witch Sword (Hong Kong, 1968: Wong Hok-Sing)** - Hung Wei plays a young lady who wants to kill a man to avenge her master's death. When his men describe the lady to their chief, this one can't believe that she is only 20 years old, because he had met her 20 years ago and had disfigured her with poison before raping her.

Later, the lady is saved by a brother (Pai Ying) and his sister and they team up in order to find the secret book of the poisons used by the evil man, helped by this one's wife, who has married him only to revenge her brother who was killed by him years ago. After some twists and fights, it appears that the young lady is the evil man's daughter and that her mother is still alive and Pai Ying kills him. A very good old movie, with an interesting plot full of twists and fights and an amazing young Pai Ying ; if not for his mole, I almost couldn't recognize him ! This movie is not even mentioned in his filmography on [hkmbd](#), [imdb](#) and on [hkcinemagic](#) ! Worth watching.

**Wolf Devil Woman (Taiwan, 1982: Pearl Chang Ling)** - Pearl Chang Ling is an interesting figure in the history of the Jade Screen, as she seems to have been a particularly ambitious woman in the Taiwanese film industry. While women like Hsu Feng and Sharon Yeung Pan turned to producing when their respective genres (70s wuxia and Girls n' Guns) had more or less run their course, Pearl had only appeared in a handful of movies before she appeared in a series of vanity projects that she herself wrote, produced, directed and starred in. While her initial movies look like pretty typical genre fare for the 70s, these later projects appear to be among the most bonkers movies being made at the time. Three of those movies form what Thomas Weisser refers to as a "conceptual trilogy," partly due to the fact that they were released in some territories as the *Wolf Devil Woman* series, while two of the movies were released in other places as the *Phoenix the Ninja* series. All three of them were Chang Ling's pet projects, and deal with her avenging the death of her parents in one way or another.

The story for *Wolf Devil Woman* is inspired by the same tale that gave rise to *The Bride With White Hair* and Li Bingbing's character in *The Forbidden Kingdom*. There's a evil cult led by a man in a golden wizard costume, complete with a cone-shaped Merlin hat with a red skull-and-crossbones that I think Pearl's young nephew cut out



of construction paper. The sorcerer is known as the Devil (who is dubbed by a man with a strong Texas drawl), and when we meet him, he is crucifying and torturing some random victim via voodoo/Maoshan magic, in which he sticks pins in a doll and even places the doll's head in boiling water. Two of the Devil's followers, a swordsman and his wife, get fed up with their master's antics and take to the hills with their newborn child to find a better life. They are tracked down by one of the Devil's generals, who looks to be wearing a Halloween mask of Bela Lugosi-by-way-of-a-fanged-gorilla, and his army of ninja. Outnumbered, the two escapees stab themselves, covering the baby in their blood (meant to keep the child warm), and then ram their heads into a wall of ice until an avalanche occurs. The baby is rescued from a snowy grave by a pack of wolves, who proceed to raise her in whatever way a pack of wolves could raise a human.

Twenty years later, the baby has grown into a wolf woman, meaning that she growls, kills small rabbits with her mouth and devours them raw, and can perform wire stunts as needed. She also has a curvature of the spine from walking around on all fours for most of her life. Meanwhile, elsewhere on the snowy mountain where she lives, a young swordsman named Rudolph (yes, that's how he's named in the credits) and his annoying sidekick Rudy (I swear I'm not making this up) is looking for a plant called 1000-year-old ginseng. This special ginseng is the key to surviving the Devil's freezing spells (very similar to the Jinxes freezing attack in Jet Li's [b]Kung Fu Cult Master[/b]), which is important, since in the past 20 years, the Devil and his armies have been on a killing spree, massacring any kung fu master who doesn't agree to join him. Rudolph and Rudy meet the wolf girl, whom the former names "Snow Hibiscus." He teaches her language and uses his kung fu chiropractor skills to correct her spine. She eventually informs Rudolph that she herself ate the Thousand-Year Ginseng when she was a little girl, which is bad news for everybody back home. Rudolph does perk Snow Hibiscus's interest in his quest by revealing a chamber in her snow cave where the frozen corpse of her (human) mother is.

Long story short: Rudolph is kidnapped by the Devil's men, who subject him to the hypnosis skills of the Devil's female witch companion. He becomes the Red Devil, a servant to the our faux Merlin. After some fish-out-of-water scenes involving Snow Hibiscus, she learns the truth of her parentage and swears revenge against the Devil and his army of ninja.

This is one of those movies that looks totally awesome when reading a plot synopsis of it, but the actual movie falls a little short of one's expectations. I mean, Thomas Weisser gave the movie a four-star rating in [Asian Cult Cinema](#) and Keith Allison of Teleport City said, "With a decent helping of comedy, tons of martial action (most of it average but enjoyable swordplay), and Cheung Ling in a little wolf outfit, you simply can't go wrong with this film. After all, it has all those things in spades." I didn't quite feel the same way. After the first 10 minutes or so, the movie sort of drags until the final 20 minutes, which are admittedly extremely entertaining. But too much time is spent with the "domestication" and integration of Snow Hibiscus that I found myself busying myself with other things while waiting for the action to kick in again.

And then you get to those glorious final moments, where Hibiscus puts on a nice white dress (I can only assume Rudy paid for it) and whips out her signature weapon, a long, fur-covered cord with dessicated animal claws at each end. She tracks the evil ninja through forests, deserts and other terrain, hacking every last one of them to pieces with her weapon. Sometimes she wraps the cord around a poor sucker's neck and yanks his head off. There's one doomed sap whom Hibiscus literally tears limb from limb with her bare hands. All of this is filmed with wires and quick cuts, much like the way that Ching Siu-Tung filmed his wuxia films during the 90s. Purists should indeed beware, but people who simply like "weird fu" will certainly get a kick out of all this.

She finally storms the Devil's lair, who unleashes his army of zombies (which hop around like guanxi). The idea is that the Devil collected dozens of kung fu masters from his raids and imprisoned them. He then placed golden needles inside Maoshan-enchanted dolls, which paralyzed them. I assume that being the one to place the golden needle in them also meant that if he removed the needles, they would become zombies. That's what happens. So you have this final showdown where Snow Hibiscus is ripping these hopping zombies to shreds with her claw weapon while Rudolph, now on our side again, is flying around on wires shooting golden arrows (as in arrows made of gold, which he just happened to have on hand near the convenient forge) at the zombies, which is also their weakness. The Devil also keeps part of his life force inside of a doll, which results in the tragic lesson of "if you're going to make a Chinese equivalent to a horcrux to house your soul, don't keep it in plain sight of everybody."

So there's a lot of weirdness and bizarre supernatural shtuff on display, plus some animal dismemberment for [bad] measure, but I wish it was spread out a lot more uniformly through the film, instead of clumped together during the first and last 20 minutes of the movie.

**Woman Avenger (Taiwan, 1980 – Lee Tso-Nam) - a.k.a. Fatal Claws, Deadly Kicks; Killa B's** - Although I can't say that this film was one of Tarantino's inspirations for *Kill Bill*, it does bear a number of similarities in the plot. It's a very low budget kung fu film directed by one of Taiwan's greatest directors, Lee Tso-Nam, and starring second-

string femme fatale actress, Hsia Kwan-Li. It's a pretty good film whose raison d'être is to show off all of Hsia's many physical talents.

The movie begins with a married couple riding down a road while talking about their future. They're stopped by a group of bandits wearing masks, who are interested in something the husband is carrying with him. A fight breaks out and the husband is killed while his wife is raped by one of the bandits and left for dead.

Some time later the young lady wakes up in the care of a Shaolin nun, who found her and took care of her. Upon learning that the nun knows kung fu, she begs the nun to teach her. The nun is reluctant, since the girl has made it clear that she wants to kill each and every bandit responsible for her husband's death. The girl is finally able to convince the nun to teach her, and she learns the Dragon Fist style.

She soon breaks her vow to not use her a\*\*kicking abilities to kill when she breaks up a fight between some poor shmuck and a bunch of robbers, killing one of them in the process. Goign into town, she dresses up like a man (not a very convincing one, either) and starts beating up as many bandits as she can get her hands on. This catches the attention of a portly waiter, who just happens to be studying kung fu with one of the bandits from the beginning.

While hanging around the kung fu school where the waiter practices, the girl discovers that they're on to her (well, him). She challenges one of the guys to a duel and kills him. The guy turns out to be the son of one of the original bandits. The father appears and she fights and kills him, too. She then appears to the waiter's kung fu teacher in female dress and kills him, too.

The girl (still dressed as a man) goes undercover at a brothel to ferret out the fourth bandit. He's on to her and in the resulting fight, she gets beat down and only lives because another woman shows up and rescues her. The girl turns out to be the daughter of the kung fu master of the fifth and main bandit, a blonde-haired kung fu master. The latter woman decides to teach our heroine how to kick like mad, preparing her for the film's final fights.

This is a very lean kung fu film that establishes the main conflict in the first five minutes and dedicates the rest of the running time to either training, fighting, or setting up the next fight. As another reviewer of this film said, there's no moralizing, romance, intrigue, comic interludes or anything else like.

The film belongs to Hsia Kwan Li, who really steals the show. For most of the early fights, she uses hand techniques and a bit of acrobatics against her opponents. She has a nasty tendency to break multiples limbs on her opponents before delivering the death blow. In the climatic fights, she unleashes a barrage of flexible kicking that's very reminiscent of the stuff Jackie Chan's aunt (Linda Lin) did in the first *Drunken Master*. It's really good.

The main villain is played by Peng Kong, who also was the film's action director. He looks pretty good in action, too. His choreography is occasionally too acrobatic and synchronized, but it's some really solid femme fatale fighting. There are some weapons thrown in, including the butterfly swords, shuangdao (double sabers), short spears, and long spear. The final set piece, where the two women take on the fourth and fifth bandits is very good, especially to people like me who like superkickers.

Obs: Peng Kong, Hsia Kwan Li, and director Lee Tso Nam had previously worked together in *The Leg Fighters* and work pretty well here, too. Peng and Lee also worked together as choreographer and director, respectively, in the classic *Shaolin vs. Lama*. Peng Kong worked on a few Jackie Chan movies and is believed by some to have done some acrobatic doubling for Jackie.

**Writing Kung Fu (Hong Kong, 1979: Bolo Yeung)** - Grim and unusual Kung Fu flick directed by Martial Arts super villain Bolo Yeung. John Chang (*Snake In The Monkeys Shadow*) stars as a teacher in a small rural village. He has no kung fu skills and often suffers at the hands of the local gangsters. A stranger (Bolo) appears in town one day pretending to be salt/tea trader. Only he's really a famous murderer Ah Yen who once wiped out an entire village on his own. Soon things go from bad to worse for the teacher. Before you know it he's getting drunk and acting like a loon. Meanwhile Ah Yen is plotting to rob the local gangsters and make off with their loot. Lucky for the teacher he drops on a pair of winos who are also skilled in Martial Arts. Throughout the course of the film our hero stops hitting the bottle and gradually picks up the art of kung fu.

I was a little disappointed the first time I watched this movie. It's not a bad film but I kinda expected more action from a film directed by & starring Bolo. The fight choreography is really good however with some great acrobatics, but there's just too little of it. Bolo steals the film as the evil Ah Yen, who likes to play the flute whilst he fights his enemies. This sight alone is worth watching the film for. Despite some goofy moments most of the film is very serous and grim in tone. No classic, but still worth a watch for fans of old school Martial Arts cinema.

**Yellow-Faced Tiger (Hong Kong, 1974: Lo Wei) – aka Slaughter in San Francisco** - Despite of the fact that Lo Wei's *Yellow Faced Tiger* was produced in 1974, the film's origin dates back to 1972, when it was originally planned to be Bruce Lee's 3rd project following *Fist of Fury* (1972). However, due to Lee's much-publicized squabble with Wei, the two went separate ways and *Yellow Faced Tiger* was indefinitely shelved.

Some believe that Lee refused to work with Wei for a number of reasons. One may have been that Wei, who dubbed himself "Hong Kong's First Millionaire Director," publicly took full credit for the success of both *The Big Boss* (1971) and *Fist of Fury* (1972). Wei even went as far as saying he was responsible for teaching Lee how to fight on camera, which obviously made Lee furious.

Another reason is the two rarely saw eye to eye. During shooting, Lee would often clash with Wei, criticizing him for spending more time in his trailer or off set, and less time overseeing the progress and quality of his productions. When instances like this occurred, it was Lee who took charge and became an informal co-director.

Then there are the rumors: George Tan, a noted Bruce Lee Historian, has said the following about the Wei/Lee feud: "The REAL reason behind the feud was Raymond Chow (founder of Golden Harvest Studios). Chow is the master of divide and conquer. Chow was sleeping with Wei's wife at the time. Imagine what would have happened if Wei found out at that critical point. What if he told Lee to split and form a new company away from Chow? Chow was/is a true master. Lee was a novice in that arena."

Whatever the truth may be, anyone who has seen Wei's non-Bruce Lee films can't deny that Lee's presence - both on screen and off - is what made the *The Big Boss* and *Fist of Fury* the classics that they're known as today. The same scenario can be applied to Robert Clouse - just watch any movie he directed after *Enter the Dragon* (1973).

In 1974, a year after Lee's passing shook the entire Hong Kong film industry, Chow finally decided unshelve *Yellow Faced Tiger*. Determined to find someone to fill Lee's shoes, Golden Harvest held a talent search in New York where they discovered Don Wong Tao, an avid Taekwondo practitioner who slightly resembled Lee. Impressed with both his looks and his physical ability, Golden Harvest immediately signed Wong Tao for a multi-picture deal.

Golden Harvest also brought back American Karate Champion, Chuck Norris, as the film's ruthless villain. It's possible that Norris, who was previously handpicked by Lee for *Way of the Dragon* (1972), was still under a contractual obligation with Golden Harvest. Fact is, the only reason he did *Way of the Dragon* was because he was friends with Lee. Besides, he was already a highly established Karate figure with ties to Hollywood heavies, so why else would he backpedal for a low budget Chinese production starring a pseudo Bruce Lee?

Considering *Yellow Faced Tiger* was shot in San Francisco, California - with a cast consisting of many Caucasian and African American talent - many assume that the film was intended for Western audiences a la *Enter the Dragon*. Contrary to that belief, the film wouldn't make its way into America until 1981 for one particular reason (more on that later).

In a nutshell, *Yellow Faced Tiger* revolves around a Chinese cop named officer Wong (Wong Tao) who's having a really bad week. After Wong saves his buddy (Robert Jones) from being beaten to death by a gang, he gets kicked off the force for accidentally killing one of the thugs. Wong then takes a job at a Chinese restaurant where he comes across a crime syndicate boss (Norris) who wants to recruit him because of his fighting skills. When Wong refuses, the syndicate makes his life a living hell.

Like many post-Lee, early 70s Golden Harvest films, *Yellow Faced Tiger* is one dodgy production. It's what you would expect from Wei: Shaky cameras (unintentionally, not artistically), rushed shots and horrendous acting. But make no mistake, its hilarious imperfections make it a riot to watch. Without doubt, it falls under the cliché "so bad, it's good" category.

The film is definitely action-packed, courtesy of veteran fight choreographer Han Ying Chieh (better known as the guy who plays "The Boss" in *The Big Boss*). If you're aware of the non-Lee fights Chieh staged for *The Big Boss*, then you should have a solid idea of what *Yellow Faced Tiger* has to offer. Let's just say that the choreography was the typical early 70s, basher-type fights, which were bland, especially compared to the grace and fluidity that Lee had to offer.

Nonetheless, it's apparent that Wong Tao was choreographed with Bruce Lee's fighting-style in mind. Lee's trademark clenched-fist pauses, intense facial features and one punch/kick knockdowns are all here; only problem is Wong Tao isn't Lee, so the carbon copied movements come across as forced and out of place. Like Lee, Wong Tao is often shirtless and sports a similar hair style. That said, *Yellow Faced Tiger* should be classified as a Bruceploitation flick.

Unfortunately, after *Yellow Faced Tiger* failed to bring in box office numbers, Golden Harvest came to the conclusion that Wong Tao wasn't a bankable star, so after two movies - the other, a partial role in *Chinatown Capers* (1974) - Wong Tao and Golden Harvest parted ways.

A couple years later, Wong Tao ultimately found glory when he hooked up with Seasonal Films' Ng See Yuen to appear in a new film, opposite Hwang Jang Lee and John Liu. Instead of trying to make him another "new Bruce Lee," Yuen was able to showcase Wong Tao in a different light. The result: *The Secret Rivals* (1976), which ended up being a major hit and has remained a cult classic to this very day.

Also of note in *Yellow Faced Tiger* is an early appearance of actress, Sylvia Chang (*The Lady Killer*). Despite her raunchy role (in one fully clothed scene, she gets off by pretending to be raped by two men), Chang went on to become one of the most successful Hong Kong stars, reaching critical acclaim for her acting, writing and directing skills. You have to start somewhere, right?

The bottom line: *Yellow Faced Tiger* is one of the worst films in the Golden Harvest catalog, but like *The Man Called Tiger* (1973) and *Stoner* (1974), it's highly entertaining because of its flaws and interesting for its historical connection with Bruce Lee.

**Yoga and the Kung Fu Girl (Taiwan, 1979: Sun Yang) - aka Octagon Force** - This film is set during that magical kungfu time that could be 1800, could be 1979. The bands of roving kungfu thugs who control the countryside seem to set the film firmly in the past, but the comical references to Jackie Chan and hippies throw everything askew. Who knows? If there's one thing kungfu films love to disregard, it's that little thing called sense. That's why in Fantasy Mission Force Jackie Chan and Brigitte Lin can team up to fight World War II Nazis in Cadillacs who have kidnapped Abraham Lincoln.

Anyway, Madame Kuo raises six children to be an acrobatic troupe. One of them grows up to be Chi Kuan-chun, best known for his many roles alongside Alexander Fu Sheng in many of the Shaw Brothers best films (5 Masters of Death, Invincible Kungfu Brothers, Death Chambers). Another grows up to be Phoenix Chin, a martial arts actress I know nothing about and have never heard of outside of this film. Too bad, because her flexible yoga style kungfu is a sight to behold.

They all work to sell a somewhat questionable health elixir in order to keep their school open, though I'm not certain how expensive it is to run a school that never accepts any new students, and the small group of current students all work for free at the place. The group gets on the wrong end of some corrupt officials, and soon Madame Kuo is murdered and her students are seeking revenge against the evil Dr. Chan, who is so friendly at first that you know immediately he is the bad guy. That's a lesson for you -- if a guy in one of those long white robes and a black fedora is really friendly to you and helps you out on countless selfless ways, there's a good chance he's going to try and kick you later on.

Phoenix is an interesting fighter to watch, as she contorts and twists in ways no human should. I'd like to know more about her, but if this film is the only testament, it's not a bad thing to go on. She is a mute in this film, and seems to communicate with the rest of the cast through a disembodied female narrator. That's a pretty good trick in and of itself, but you lump it in with the ability to tie herself into a pretzel while kicking goons in the head, she becomes even more impressive.

This film is full of weird comedy that few people will understand. A lot of people like to attribute this to cultural differences, and sometimes that may be true. Sometimes, though, I think these films are just insane. When it all comes down to the money, Dr. Chan, Phoenix, and her two useless male sidekicks face off in a fight to the death. But then, is there any other kind?

Overall, this movie manages to be just above average, which means I enjoyed it quite a bit, since a kungfu movie can be way below average and still please me. I like watching Phoenix fight because it's a weird, new style that makes all the fights more unique. Not an earth-shatteringly great film, but a solid, enjoyable little romp. Sometimes, that's just what I need.

**Young Avenger (Hong Kong, 1980: Wilson Tong)** - Wong Yue is typically cast as another cheeky scamp who spends the first half hour of the film hatching various scams in the local casino leading to a few good scraps. His job as an undertaker's apprentice provides plenty of opportunity for grave robbing until he is apparently confronted by the ghost of one of his victims. Wong Yue's fear is overcome by his greed when the ghost offers him money to track down three people.

Of course the ghost turns out to be a real man; left horribly facially scarred by his three former escort colleagues (that's escort in the sense of transporting valuables). When Wong Yue hears his sad story he agrees to help the wronged man get his revenge.

If comedy in kung fu isn't your thing then this film is probably not for you as it doesn't really get serious until the last thirty minutes. There's still plenty of action to keep the viewer interested although the first fight scene doesn't occur until about twenty minutes in.

However when Wang Yue takes on his avenger persona the viewer is treated to one excellent kung fu bout after another. Highlights include two encounters with the fabulous Tsui Siu Keung, aided by a knife wielding (and very cute) Wong Hang Sau. Wilson Tong's choreography is top notch stuff; full of long takes of intricate sequences of moves performed at speed.

Wilson Tong gives a stunning performance as the main villain reminiscent of his cameo in 'The Victim' that earned him the nickname of 'Foot Doctor'. While there's some discussion over how much he was doubled by Yuen Biao in that film, here it's quite obvious it's really Wilson. The one weak link (in fighting ability anyway), Wong Yue, is actually more impressive here than in any other film in which I've seen him.

While it does take rather too long to get to the serious action, once it does 'Young Avenger' is fantastic stuff.

**Young Dragons, The (Hong Kong, 1974: John Woo)** - This is not a bad film by any definition though it is probably of more importance for what it means for the future career of the participants than for the actual quality of the film. This is the first directed full-length film from John Woo (credited as Wu Yu-sheng on the English titles). Originally Woo was co-director of this production, under the title of *Farewell Buddy*, with Peter Wong Hoi Yi\* who had just created an independent movie company with Liu Chi-ho's money. This was originally done in 1973 but had run afoul by the censors because of violence. It actually had to do mainly with some gloves that had needles in them worn by Fung Hak-on's character in which you can still see in the film and some of the results of those gloves on Lau Kong (though in the last scene you may wonder where those marks went to on his face and you will notice he never shows that side as well) and Ng Ming-choi. You may wonder why they got such marks when you watch this. The reason was that they had to be cut or the film would not have been allowed to shown. The censorship board was worried that impressionable youths would be influenced to use these type of weapons. This hurts the continuity of that particular fight scene. Fortunately the film was sold to Golden Harvest, Leonard Ho liked it and gave Woo a three year contract.

The story takes place during the Chinese Republican era with Henry Yu Yung (*The Bloody Fists*) as an opportunist but lovable rogue Kin, hard not to think of David Chiang in this role, who is the leader of small gang of efficient criminals, but is a small cog compared to the smuggling operation of Boss Lung (Chiang Nan) and his hired number-one thug Wang Fai (Fung Hak-on.) Kin steals a load of Japanese firearms from Lung and uses them as bait to get even more money (still do not agree why he gets rid of all but one.) As he is trying to make money off of this racket in the meantime a government agent Fan Ming (Lau Kong) is trying to stop these smuggler/racketeers as he has a personal vengeance against Boss Lung.

The fight scenes are decent-to-good though the scenery and photography tends to outshine the actual action. It was nice to see some throws in the choreography. The use of the horse and dragging was quite unexpected though probably a reference to one of the many westerns John Woo had seen. This is one of Jackie Chan's earliest action director roles (a few of the films he did in 1973 including *The Cub Tiger from Kwantung* would be reedited and released in a later year.) I was surprised by how agile Ng Ming-choi was (he is the rascal sidekick of Kin) given his corpulent nature. He is almost like a mini-Sammo Hung. I probably should not have been surprised since he is also known as Yuen Ting as he was one of the Seven Little Fortunes and he is not the only "Yuen" in the movie.

One good reason to watch this if you are a Woo fan is the early trademarks and influences you can already see taking shape here from interesting ways of lighting cigarettes to birdcages. The slow-motion reminds me of Chang Cheh in which Woo apprenticed under as well as Sam Peckinpah which is a fan of. He also has a nice habit of experimenting with interesting angles, composition and movement of the camera. However, he completely overuses the zoom to the point of extreme annoyance. You can see the friendship and Doppelganger motif

between the two main characters reminiscent of *Hard Boiled* with one good-hearted "bad guy" character and one character on the side of the law and the importance of personal code. Also included is the completely ruthless henchman character Wang Fai and corrupt Boss Lung which parallels both Mad Dog and Johnny Wong in *Hard Boiled*. While the male relationships seem to work well, the love quadrangle seems somewhat haphazard. Chang Cheh would have ignored it completely. But the ending definitely feels Woo-like and a precursor of things to come. I would recommend this for fans of Hong Kong cinema and/or John Woo though expect a very basic plot.

**Young Hero (Hong Kong, 1980: John Law)** - The Japanese, featuring Japanese born South Korean Hwang Jang-Lee, are tearing down signs and beating up kung fu teachers to prove their martial arts is superior. Our hero befriends a beggar and takes him to tea. A fight breaks out. A girl steps in to stop it and she beats up our hero. The master learns of the fight and cuts off his training and makes him do book learning. The book teacher is uncle of the girl who beat him. The Japanese also defeat hero's teacher but do not kill him. They are also smuggling on the side. Master's son defeats some of the lesser Japanese but ultimately loses. He complains to teacher that he is holding back on secret techniques and these techniques are becoming lost. Our hero learns mental strategy from the book teacher and is able to defeat the girl now. (Why didn't she also learn this from her uncle will never be known.) The son gets a rematch and revenge but it is mostly accidental. Hwang Jang-Lee becomes more angry and returns to kill four sons. There is more training, more revenge on revenge, and even a lion dance is thrown in for some reason.

The movie seems to have big production values but remains obscure today. It was dubbed into English for VHS release and there is also a wide screen dubbed version but the one I have though wide screen is no better video resolution than VHS. There are also Thai subtitles in a few places for some reason.

I have said that the best of these movies are all about the martial arts for a story line. This movie, in addition to the revenge plot, is all about the martial arts but it is not one of the best. The movie is by the numbers, formulaic, good enough but never goes beyond that. There is only one moment of creativity and that it is the training session on the raft. I rate it completely average for the year and genre and it carries my average recommendation for the average fan.

**Young Hero of Shaolin (Taiwan, 1975: Ulysses Au)** - *Young Hero of Shaolin* was the sequel to Meng Fei's *The Prodigal Boxer*. The latter stands out as being the first modern kung fu film (i.e. kung fu film made after 1970) about Chinese folk hero Fong Sai-Yuk. Fong Sai-Yuk is known in Chinese history for being one of the first laymen to study kung fu at the Shaolin Temple and for being a staunch anti-Qing (re: Manchurian) patriot. He was a contemporary of Hung Shi-Kwan, another layman student of Shaolin kung fu and recognized founder of the famous *hung gar* style of kung fu. Fong himself is often considered to be a proponent of the same style and was often portrayed in movies by actors trained in *hung gar*. *The Prodigal Boxer* is considered to be a genre classic by most fans of the genre, if mainly for historical value, as the fights themselves are a bit on the crude side. In this film, Meng Fei's portrayal of Fong Sai-Yuk come across for the type of likably-cocky fighter that Jackie Chan would popularize a few years later.

Meng Fei returns as Fong Sai-Yuk, this time getting involved with an evil kung fu school who has been brutalizing the locals. He goes undercover at the school as a servant and gradually kills the evil teacher's main bodyguards one by one until it's time to face the main bad guy himself. Tan Tao-Liang shows up as a wandering fighter named Kao who goes around challenging schools and fighters to duels. Kao tries to fight Fong early on, but Fong declines. Kao eventually defeats the villain's bodyguards and joins the school. Obviously, his presence will be a threat to Fong, whom Kao recognizes almost instantly. The two eventually fight, after which they form an uneasy bond and team up for the final fights.

The good news here is that Tao Tao-Liang steals the show with his charisma and kicking skills. He's allowed a little more range than the usual stoic persona that defined most of his career and gets to smile quite a bit. His kicking is good, with him performing high and fast spin kicks with both legs. His handwork is rather simple, in sharp contrast to Meng Fei's more elaborate *hung gar* techniques. His fights, as with all the others, are rather short. Sadly, his talents are completely wasted in the finale, even though he gets to fight the principal villain along side Meng Fei. That said, his best fight is his introductory fight, where he beats up the students of some random school *plus said school's* teacher.

Ulysses Au's direction here is standard; he doesn't do anything here to really set the movie apart from the hundreds of other movies that make up the old school chopsockey film. Nor does he use his talent well; in addition to Tan Tao-Liang not getting as much fight time as he deserved, Taiwanese kung fu starlet Doris Lung Jun-Erh is completely wasted in a non-fighting role. *Hung Gar* specialist Lau Kar-Wing, brother of legendary Shaw Brothers director Lau Kar-Leung, takes on the action directing duties once more (he was the action director of *The Prodigal Boxer*) and

does a fairly good job by 1975 standards. There are some spots of creativity, including a quartet of villains made up of a Mongolian axe thrower, a man who fights with a fishing net, a swordsman who wears his sword like a belt, and an ersatz Shaolin abbot. There is also some stock footage from the first film showing us that movie's final fights as part of a flashback sequence; it's a little easier to forgive that since home video hadn't quite been invented at that time.

**Young Hero of Shaolin (People's Republic of China, 1984: Ngai Hoi-Fung, Yang Fan)** - This here is a snazzy film detailing the life of legendary Chinese hero, Fong Sai-yuk, and continues to prove that while Hong Kong may be the movie-making center of Asia (well, after India), the Mainland is just as good at making incredible martial arts films. It's a shame we don't get to see more of what they do over there. Of the four Mainland kungfu films I've seen four of them have been completely stunning. You do the math there, Mr. Smart Guy. They relied a lot less (or not at all) on tricks and fancy camera work and instead just concentrated on filming the best no-nonsense martial arts possible.

China has one big advantage over Hong Kong, and that's space. Lots of it. China may be the world's most populated country, but it's also pretty damn big, and once you get out of the cities, China contains some of the most diverse and breath-taking landscapes anywhere in the world. The location work here is great, as a result, though not nearly as compelling as *Kids From Shaolin*, which was a really beautiful film.

The kungfu is top-notch, and the acting is good. What more can you ask for in a kungfu film? Or any film, if you are like me. When someone told me to see the "charming *You've Got Mail*," my first question was "How is Meg Ryan's kungfu?" When I found out she didn't do any, well, you know how it is.

While this isn't quite as good as the Mainland's best known Shaolin film (*Shaolin Temple* starring Jet Li Lian-jie), it still ranks among the top kungfu films ever made. *Young Hero of Shaolin* chronicles Fong Sai-yuk's arrival at the Shaolin Temple (actual), where the monks kick ass, sleep on suspended ropes, cook using a Buick sized wok while hanging upside down from the ceiling and using a ten foot pole to stir with (much like I do myself), and other such things you do when you're part of the baddest religion on the planet. You don't catch Christian monks doing stuff this cool ... although they do make wine, so maybe somewhere there are some Christian monks doing drunken boxing.

After a while, Fong Sai-yuk leaves the temple to go out and spread peace and ass kickings to villains across China. That's the biggest advantage to being a Buddhist monk rather than a Catholic one. You can be into peace and harmony but are still allowed to dole out righteous beat-downs to the evil-doers of the world. Catholic monks and nuns aren't really afforded the same ability, though I know of a few Catholic Brothers over in Brooklyn that will take your ass in a boxing match. However, I don't know how the Pope feels about his sheep going out to beat up wrong-doers.

Fong duels with all sorts of crooked types before settling in to deal out some Shaolin justice during a crooked martial arts tournament. You know Fong has to jump up there and do some fighting on top of poles. Wonderful kungfu, a good story, great sets and costumes, and a good story make this an all-around quality production that any self-respecting kungfu fan needs to have in their arsenal.

**Young Hero from Shaolin 2 (People's Republic of China, 1986: Ngai Hoi-Fung) - Iron Man; Fong Sai Yuk 3: O Dragão** - I complained at length in my review of the first *Young Hero of Shaolin* film that the movie, in its attempts to fit in as much of Fong Sai-Yuk's life as possible into the running time, became an episodic collection scenes, several of which were completely unrelated to the rest of the film around it. Moreover, the film was rather stingy on the fight, especially during the first fifty minutes or so. Despite some ambitious gimmicks to the fights, most of the choreography was uninspired until the final tournament.

*Young Hero from Shaolin 2* goes out of its way to correct most of these flaws and is generally successful at doing so. There are two parallel plot threads established early on that intertwine by the end of the first act, so that we have an overarching conflict for the entire film. This is a major step forward from the first film, which sets up the two villains in the first scene and then keeps them out of the story until the last twenty minutes. The plot is also ambitious enough to include a villain who's the brother of a character Fong Sai-Yuk fought in the previous film, which serves as a link between the two films.

One of my major issues with *Young Hero from Shaolin* was how it treated the supporting characters. Characters often showed in film simply because they "needed" to, but were quickly forgotten by the narrative. That was especially true with Wu Wai-Kin and Fong Sai-Yuk's mother. This movie doesn't make that mistake to such a degree,

as the film is just about as much about Wu Wai-Kin as it is about Fong Sai-Yuk. While Miu Chui-Fa (Fong's mother) doesn't have a lot to do, she at least gets to participate in the film's major set pieces.

Speaking of which, veteran director Ngai Hoi-Fung eschewed the inexperienced Mainland choreographers in favor of a couple of a third-string Hong Kong action director. The movie is that much richer for it. Poon Yiu-Kwan worked on a dozen or so low budget films during the early 1970s, his main claim to fame being assistant action director in King Hu's masterpiece *A Touch of Zen*. Lam Moon-Wah, who worked with Ngai on *Story of the Drunken Master*, is known around these parts for his superlative work on Yuen Biao's *Hero of Swallow*. Quite frankly, this features some of the best choreography I've ever seen in a Mainland Chinese martial arts film.

The movie's not perfect, however, but we'll mention bring up the film's flaws as we discuss the plot.

The movie starts out at the Shaolin Temple, where we meet Fong Sai Yuk (a returning Shut Bo-Wa). The opening scenes are rather confusing. We start with the Shaolin abbot gathering all of the monks together and saying that he has something to tell him. Suddenly, the film cuts to another part of the temple, where Fong Sai-Yuk is practicing his two-finger strike. Instead of striking things with his fingers, he prefers to do a one-handed handstand, but with only his index and middle fingers supporting his weight. Strangely enough, the abbot is watching, despite his declaring before that he had a declaration to make. I'll also point out that the change in music is as abrupt as the scene change itself. After Fong's demonstration, there's another jarring cut to the Shaolin monks walking around the temple. I think this was taken from the earlier scene.

The next scene establishes Principle Plot Thread #1. The local Qing magistrate, Chang Bill (Yes, his name is Chang BILL!), is told by his boss that the Emperor is growing suspicious of Shaolin. Chang Bill is tasked with rooting out the rebels. Okay, that's all well and good. After all, the Shaolin Temple was really purged by the Qing government during Fong Sai-Yuk's lifetime. The problem is the scene after that, where Chang Bill goes to Wudan to solicit their services in this endeavor.

There's nothing wrong with the Wudan subplot. It's shown up in films like *Two Champions of Shaolin* and *Showdown at Cotton Mill*. While modern Wudan student typically deny that Wudan ever collaborated in the Qing's campaign against Shaolin, it's enough of a folk story that there may be some kernel of truth to it. The problem is that the Wudan school figure little in the story until the final series of battles. It certainly adds a level of scope to the film, but it's hardly developed.

A bigger problem with the scene between Chang Bill and the leader of the Wu Tang Clan (yes, Wu Tang and Wudan are one and the same) is that Chang Bill specifically singles out Fong Sai-Yuk as their single target. He also seems extremely bent on killing Fong. That's all well and good, but the other official had alluded to their being multiple rebels. So if you're told to purge a temple because of rebel activity, why would you focus on a single layman who's not even a full-time student anymore? Now if Fong Sai-Yuk were a rebel leader, that would make some degree of sense. But there's nothing in the film that establishes Fong Sai-Yuk as a rebel in the first place. Yes, we know he was a big Ming patriot in real life, but the film more or less expects the viewer to be familiar with the history. That would be less of a problem if it weren't for a piece of dialogue of Fong's: "I never thought I'd see a government official who acted like a villain." As silly and naïve as it is, it shows that Fong was never much of a rebel to begin with, nor did have any inherent dislike of the Qing rulers.

The next ten minutes of the film or so are made up of a bunch of random fights, which is always good. First we see Fong Sai-Yuk beating some of Chang Bill's cronies, who are out terrorizing the populace. Then Wu Wai-Kin (now played by Cheung Wang-Mooi, whose only other film credit is as a costume designer for *Miss Du Ni Shiang*) gets in a fight with a couple of bozos at a restaurant who mistaken him for Fong Sai-Yuk. That fight is followed by one set at Wu's uncle's (Chan Dung, *Dragon from Russia* and *The God of Cookery*) kung fu school, in which a bunch of thugs working for Dragon Head show to intimidate the school into not participating in the upcoming lion dance. The teacher's daughter, Ngo Fa-Kiu (Maggie Lam, *Four Dragons* and *Fun and Fury*), unleashes some pa-kua and helps keep the men at bay. Later on, a bunch of random hoodlums try to jump Wu Wai-Kin on his way home, all of whom are no match for Wu and his eagle claw style.

Wu Wai-Kin arrives at the Ngo school and the resulting dialogue between him and his uncle reveal Principle Plot Thread #2. Wu Wai-Kin's parents were murdered by Dragon Head, who then used his influence to take over Wu's family business: a clothes dye factory. Wu was then sent to Shaolin to train in kung fu in order to avenge his parents' murder. Apparently, this actually happened, or at least is a big part of the Wu Wai-Kin legend, since it shows up in Chang Cheh's *Men from the Monastery*. The movie quickly establishes Dragon Head as being in cahoots with Chang Bill, thus sparing us a pair of underdeveloped plotlines. There'll be plenty room for that with the introduction of villain #3.

Said villain is Lu Tai-Pang (Li Yu-Wen, *The Undaunted Wudang*), also known as the "Iron Mantis." He's Tiger Lu's brother, whom I assume to be the same as Lui Hung, the main villain from the first film. He's understandably upset that his brother died in a duel with Fong Sai-Yuk and wants his revenge.



So there's an extended lion dance sequence, which ends in a huge brawl between the rival schools. During the lion dance, Chang Bill decides that he rather likes Fa-Kiu (snicker) and asks Dragon Head to kidnap her for him. I like how in this scene, Chang Bill's wife is listening in on her husband's plans and her only reaction is a monotone "Oh, not another one." Dragon Head employs Lu Tai-Pang's services in kidnapping Fa-Kiu at some night festival, which is part of a trap to catch both Fong Sai-Yuk and Wu Wai-Kin.

Fa-Kiu \*snicker\* is indeed kidnapped by Dragon Head and his gang, although not after a well-choreographed fight between her, Lu Tai-Pang, and Dragon Head's men. And sure enough, Fong Sai-Yuk and Wu Wai-Kin are donning their "ninja gear" (yes, they use this term, even though there are no ninja in China, save the Lin Kuei) and going to Dragon Head's place. They follow Dragon Head and Lu Tai-Pang into the forest, where they fall into a trap. The only reason they leave the forest alive is because of the sudden intervention of Fong Sai-Yuk's mother (a returning Chan Wing-Ha). After another random fight at a dye factory, Fong Sai-Yuk is challenged to a duel by Lu Tai-Pang. The locale just happens to be the sacred mountain retreat of Pai Mei himself (Chui Ngai). Everybody knows it's a trap, there's no doubt about that. The problem is that even if they survive the next series of fights, there's still the chance they'll have to deal with an irate Pai Mei.

The scope of the plot here is far more ambitious than that of the last movie, since it tries to incorporate the events of the lives of not one, but two Chinese folk heroes into a single story arc. That's a pretty tall order for a movie that's less than a 100 minutes long, and obviously some subplots are going to suffer. The obvious underdeveloped subplot is that involving Pai Mei. According to most legends, Fong Sai-Yuk really did face off against Pai Mei, who may or may not have betrayed Shaolin. While their duel in the film is foreshadowed, Pai Mei doesn't actually show up onscreen until after the real villains have been eliminated. It feels more like a historical coda than a legitimate plot development.

Then there's the business with the Shaolin Spinning Palm technique. There's a brief interlude from the main plot where Fong Sai-Yuk and Wu Wai-Kin go to Shaolin to inquire of the technique from San Te. For those of you who don't know who San Te is, let me explain. San Te was a Shaolin monk who's credited as being the guy responsible for opening up the Shaolin Temple to laymen. He's the subject of several films, most notably the Lau Kar-Leung classic *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*. Anyway, San Te gives the two a brief explanation of how the technique would work. Suffice to say that there's some payoff in that Fong gets to use the technique twice at the end. The problem is that we never actually seem training to use it, despite it being a lost style that not even the Shaolin Abbot could figure out.

Most of this is forgivable because there is so much action on display that the flaws in the story don't stick out until later viewings (the sudden cuts in scenes being the main exception). Action directors Poon Yiu-Kwan and Lam Moon-Wah really outdo themselves here. Lam has been criticized before for not being a great action director. I think he proves here that his career has been a victim of time and talent restraints. There are action directors out there who can do wonders in a couple weeks' shooting time, like Donnie Yen in *Legend of the Wolf*. Lam isn't one of them. And while Poon has a pretty extensive résumé, most of his movies were cheap Taiwanese wuxia films, including *The Samurai*, which was one of the first old school movies I ever saw. I assume that Poon contributed to wire stunts in the film. There aren't a lot of them, but they are executed with a great deal more panache than most Mainland films of that era.

Lam and Poon choreograph the fights in such a way that it never feels like the actors are performing sets on each other. The punches and kicks have more impact in this film than in the last few Mainland films I've seen. Speaking of which, both Shut Bo-Wa and Cheung Wang-Mooi have some nice aerial kicks, especially Cheung during the fight against the Wu Tang Golden Formation. The showdown between Fong Sai-Yuk and Chang Bill is one of the more brutal fights in a Mainland film, right up there with the finale of *Holy Robe of Shaolin*. It's only undermined by a few seconds of unnecessary undercranking. I also call attention to Maggie Lam's baguazhang in an early fight, which is executed with more power and crispness than what we saw in *The Undaunted Wudang*.

While most of the fights are hand-to-hand, Lam and Poon keep things varied like most self-respecting Mainland films do. Chan Wing-Ha, who did little of interest in the first film, gets to perform some nice tai chi sword play in three set pieces this time around. The fight at the dye factory has numerous attackers trying to tie up Fong Sai-Yuk with long strips of cloth, which is an interesting touch. Then there's the showstopper: Fong and company take on an army of Wudan monks armed with razor sharp symbols. It's referred to as the Golden Formation and is a reference to the Lo Han Formation of the last film, but on a larger scale. The choreography, while a bit chaotic, is far more interesting here than it was in the last film. Watching dozens of extras move in unison is just too cool for words.

All things considered, *Young Hero of Shaolin 2* corrects most of the mistakes made in the first film. With that in mind, the filmmakers can field proud of themselves knowing that it is worthy to stand beside other adaptations of the Fong Sai-Yuk legend. It easily stands in the upper echelon of Mainland Chinese kung fu movies, thanks to two choreographers who, like Wu Wai-Kin, always stood in the shadows of their contemporaries. That should be reason enough to watch this film. If not, I'm sorry, but I don't know what else I can do for you.

**Young Master, The (Hong Kong, 1980: Jackie Chan)** - Jackie Chan had already established himself in Hong Kong as a box office champion with 1978's *Drunken Master* and 1979's *Fearless Hyena*, but he was not getting his fiscal due from Lo Wei Productions. So he opted out of his contract with Lo Wei and was hired by Golden Harvest. The *Young Master* was his first picture under that studio. The film was interrupted several times because of the contract dispute with Lo and a Triad that wanted a stake in Jackie's fortune. This was eventually settled with help by Jimmy Wang Yu whom Jackie would owe (along many other actors) several favors. Even with all this chaos, Jackie was still able to create a memorable and must-have film, though the movie is marked by continuity problems.

Jackie stars as Ah Lung a mediocre student (funny he doesn't seem so in the film and that point is soon forgotten) who loses in a beautifully choreographed lion dance competition because his fellow adopted brother Jing Keung (Wei Pei), faked an injury and competed incognito for the Wei Yee school. Lung and Keung's sifu Master Tien soon finds out of this deception and this betrayal leads to Keung leaving the school. After an impassioned plea from Lung, Tien gives Lung his blessing to find his brother. Jackie takes his big white fan (important plot point.) Jing looks for work at the Wei Yee school, but is turned down when he is found to have helped the Wei Yee school win the Lion Dance competition. He is then recruited with two others, including Fung Hark-On (aka Fung Ke-An who was the martial arts consultant with Jackie) who has a large mole on his face ? reminiscent of Jackie's mole in *Police Woman*, to free Master Kim (Hapkido expert Whang In Shik.) Jing uses his big white fan to help Kim escape. So Ah would later be mistaken for his brother and sought after by the local police inspector and his son (played by Hong Kong regulars Shih Kien and Yuen Biao.) This would lead up to an awesome fight scene between two of the Seven Little Fortunes, Yuen and Jackie. Yuen would expertly use a bench and you get to see Jackie use a pole again.

Even with the continuity problems (even admitted by Jackie, including one scene where Jackie is fettered and the next he is not) and the overuse of sped-up footage and zoom shots (including one that is parodied in *Kung Pow*), this is a fun film to watch.. The high points of this movie are the Cantonese comedy and the sublime martial art scenes. In those fight scenes you get to see him use many props such as sword, pole, bench and even a skirt, a skill he learns from his encounter with the Police Chief's daughter played by Lily Li. The high point of the film is a showdown that involves an 18-minute plus scene between Jackie and Whang (Jackie in his autobiography "I Am Jackie Chan" considers this his ninth best fight scene.) I do not want to describe this sagacious scene too much, because it has to be seen. I will say that I have never seen Jackie get beat up so much in any other movie and most of it is shot with wide-angle lenses with few cuts. Even his solution to winning is unique.

This movie is a must buy for Jackie Chan or Hong Kong film fans. The most important decision in buying this film on DVD is what label/version you purchase. There are many shorter versions out there, even several that are widescreen, but the scenes that are taken out are mostly from the action scenes! But, Fortune Star puts out a 106 minute version that is digitally remastered and has the Cantonese (along with dubbed version) audio. Though there is one caveat, many of the cheaper versions have a huge benefit that the Fortune Star DVD does not ? Jackie Chan singing in English at the end of the film. Even without that benefit the Fortune Star release is by far the best version of an excellent Jackie Chan film.

**Young Taoism Fighter (Taiwan, 1986: Chen Chi-Hwa) - aka Wu Tang Temple; Miracle Fighters 4** - I'd like to know what was going through Lo Wei's head in 1986 when he produced this film. I can imagine how difficult things had been for him after Jackie Chan ditched him six years before, but the old school kung fu movie had more or less been dead in its grave in Hong Kong for four years and by 1986 (and the Yuen Clan hadn't made an entry in this series in two years) the only surviving markets for this sort of movie must have been Mainland China and pockets of Taiwan and South Korea. Why produce something like this when you could foot a couple of more dollars for a modern action film that'd have a better chance of success? Were Taiwanese audiences really begging for a follow-up to *Taoism Drunkard*? Apparently Hong Kong audiences weren't, as the film apparently spent but two days in the theaters there.

That said, I know that a lot of people are rather glad this movie was made and fans of the bizarre are sure to get a lot of mileage out of it. If my memory doesn't fail me, Keith Allison of TeleportCityonce commented that a stoner friend of his preferred this film to Pink Floyd's *The Wall* in terms of films to watch while one is high. If that isn't a glowing recommendation, I don't know what is. *Young Taoism Fighter* is indeed an extremely cracked movie and despite not having an actual plot, it does deliver the weird-fu wackiness for most of its 80-some-odd minute running time. I don't think I liked it as much as the good folks at Teleport City, but then I probably went in with too high of expectations.

A plot summary of this film is a bit of a daunting task, mainly because the film is a collection of comic vignettes and fight scenes, its two main "plot lines" coming together only in the last third. But let's see what we can do:

Cheng Ko (Yuen Yat-Chor, *Instant Kung Fu Man* and *Taoism Drunkard*) is a student at the Yin Yang School of Taoist martial arts. He shows some promise as a student, but he spends most of his time goofing off and getting into trouble, much to the chagrin of his teacher, one of Head Master's brothers (Baek Hwang-Ki, *Raiders of Buddhist Kung Fu* and *Dragon Lee Strikes Back*). After giving his teacher a dose of the Taoist magic equivalent to Rogaine, Cheng Ko is punished by sent to the torture chamber run by the Master's other brother (whom I think is Tin Ming of *Kung Fu on Sale*). This time (Cheng Ko practically goes to the chamber on a daily basis), Cheng must fight the old man inside the cave in order to avoid getting his face shoved into a pile of crap.

After convincing his second teacher to not torture him any more, Cheng Ko starts sneaking around the school and finds the entrance to a secret library. Inside the library is the sutra containing the instructions the Shadow Separation Style (aka Astral Kung Fu), which allows the practitioner to create a shadow clone who is intangible to an enemy's blows, but can kick a\*\* all the same. Cheng Ko also finds a cave full of talking box turtles, who'll start dancing to disco music later in the movie. Just thought you'd like to know that.

After a comic interlude in which Cheng Ko tries to learn the Shadow Separation Style and gets the s\*\*\* kicked out of him by his own reflection, Cheng goes to see his master's third brother (Lee Man-Tai of *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*), a drunken master of considerable skill. Brother #3 finds out that Cheng has been practicing the forbidden arts and transfers his own life force into the Cheng in order to save him. It destroys the old man's kung fu, but it turns Cheng into a bonafide kung fu master.

There are a few more random scenes to come, including a dream sequence in which Cheng's friend (Tai Bo, *Ninja in the Dragon's Den* and *Project A II*) uses the Shadow Separation Style to break off four separate beings in order to make dumplings. The scene ends with a major supporting character getting sliced in half with a meat cleaver. Another set piece that has nothing to do with anything involves Cheng and his friend going to the funeral of a friend's brother. Said friend's sister-in-law apparently poisoned the deceased and is in process of screwing her lover in the same room when Cheng interrupts. Unfortunately for everybody involved, the circumstances of the dead man's demise are such that he won't reincarnate. Instead, he comes back to life as a *kuangxi* (hopping vampire) and a random fight breaks out between the Cheng Ko and the undead cuckold.

Finally the film will settle down on a single plot: There's an evil school called Tien Wu led by a powerful fighter named Wicked Wu (Chang Yi-Tao, who once gallivanted around as Bruce Lai). Wicked Wu's powerful wicked style is the result of not only lots of meditation, but also the consumption of drinking children's urine and eating placentas, supplied to him by his second-in-command (Kwang Chung, *Sword with the Windbell* and *Fire Dragon*). I find it interesting that the sorcery that second-in-command uses to mesmerize the children so that they urinate in the right place apparently curses them and causes them to prematurely age. In any early scene, Wicked Wu fights and kills a rival fighter. His sister, Miss Lee (Hilda Liu Hao-Yi, *Pink Force Commando* and *Amazon Queen Commando*), gets involved and tries to bring Wicked Wu to justice.

Cheng Ko gets involved in a fight between Lee and Wu's minions, saving her life in the process. He takes her back to the turtle cave and nurses her back to health, while Wu's minions show up at the YinYangSchool to make trouble. After a lengthy fight, the bad guys are defeated. However, there's still Wicked Wu himself that Cheng Ko and Lee will have to defeat. Can their Daydreaming Kung Fu Technique defeat his Wicked Style?

*Young Taoism Fighter* is less of a Yuen Brothers film than the previous three entries (four if you count *Drunken Tai Chi*) in their Taoist sorcery comedies. Replacing Yuen Woo-Ping as a director is Chen Chi-Hwa, best known for directing Jackie Chan's classic *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin* and *Half a Loaf of Kung Fu*. Chen was a close friend of Jackie's during his Lo Wei slog and when Chan went to bigger and better things at Golden Harvest, he often hired Chen Chi-Hwa to be his second-unit director. When Chan wrestled *Crime Story* away from Kirk Wong, it was Chen who was brought on to direct, if not choreograph, the main action sequences. Chen is also known for doing the two kung fu comedies, *Dance of Death* and *The 36 Crazy Fists*, both of which Jackie Chan choreographed as a favor to his friend.

Unfortunately, Chen Chi-Hwa doesn't quite reach the heights set by Yuen Woo-Ping in *Taoism Drunkard* and *Shaolin Drunkard*. His direction emphasizes the magical hijinks more than the kung fu and is unable to give much direction to the meandering script. I know that the other movies had their moments in which time was spent on scenes only marginally related to the plot, but this movie takes almost an hour to really settle into the main conflict. It's the *Twilight* of Yuen Clan sorcery films that way.

Unlike the other movies, that starred anywhere between three and four Yuens, this film only has one Yuen in front of the screen. Gone is Yuen Shun-Yee as the villain, being replaced a former Bruce Lee imitator with nice kicking skills. Exit Yuen Cheung-Yan as the drunken Taoist priest and enter Lee Man-Tai, who played the Beggar Clan Leader in *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*. Of course, the acrobatic skills of Yuen Cheung-Yan end up being sorely missed as Lee Man-Tai wasn't much of a martial artist. And Brandy Yuen as the grandmother? There's no analogous character this time around. All we have left is Yuen Yat-Chor, playing essentially the same character he played in other films, although he's closer in character to Jackie Chan's interpretation of Wong Fei-Hung from *Drunken Master*.

On the subject of *Drunken Master*, I spent a lot of time wondering why this movie didn't quite measure up to its predecessors and it finally became clear: *Young Taoism Fighter* is more concerned with copying the landmark Jackie Chan film than it is following in the footsteps of *Miracle Fighters* and its sequels. Talented-but-arrogant student who spends more time belittling his teacher than training? Drunken kung fu master who helps his student learn a special style? Special kung fu style that the hero has to use in the final battle because traditional kung fu is ineffective? Somebody's face being dunked into a pile of poo? The movie hits all of the expected beats of a late 70s kung fu comedy in the *Drunken Master* vein, even though that sort of film had gone out of fashion a few years before. I mean, the Yuen Clan's other sorcery films were also comedies, but they tended to stray from the "arrogant kung fu prodigy screws around and then studies secret style with old master in order to defeat the villain's unbeatable technique" mold and did their own thing, like throw in watermelon monsters and acid-shooting kung fu frogs.

Fortunately, the Yuen Boys as a whole were involved in the fight choreography, although to be honest, a lot of the fights felt as if they were in autopilot. The acrobatics are less elaborate and the wirework is less daring than usual. It's only in the final fight that their skills really break out, but we'll get there in a moment. There aren't very many fights during the first half, the notable one being Chang Yi Tao's entrance. He kicks up a storm in his first scuffle, beating up his own men in order to prove how powerful he is. I haven't seen any of Chang's other films, so I can't really judge him in comparison to, say, *Clones of Bruce Lee*. However, he does have some solid bootwork, although he's no Hwang Jang-Lee, mind you.

Things pick up in the second half when Hilda Liu and Yuen Yat-Chor have an extended fight against Wicked Wu's goons. Hilda does get to show off some nice kicks in this sequence, although I don't think this represents her best work (I'll have to watch *Shaolin Chastity Kung Fu* to confirm that). That said, as a third-string kung fu actress, the lady is rather talented. That's followed by a fight in which more of Wu's goons attack the Yin Yang school. Some of them are armed with exotic weapons, like a pair a buzz saws, for example. Both fights are slightly reminiscent of those group melées that were common in Mainland Chinese movies during the era.

Then we get to the final fight, where Hilda and Yuen take on Chang Yi Tao. It starts off pretty basic, with the three trading blows and kicks, plus the occasional synchronized acrobatics. The acrobatics are part of the Daydreaming Technique that Hilda and Yuen invent, which apparently involves them linking up telepathically and then playing the fight out in their heads before performing whatever moves they think of. Then the trademark Yuen Clan creativity really begins to shine. Chang's first weapon is the *zhuo*, or claw, which just so happens to be a skeletal hand. The hand then transforms into a bone sword and we're just getting started. The entire sequence comes to a head when Chang dismembers Yuen Yat-Chor limb for limb. At that moment, Yuen's character unleashes the full fury of the Shadow Separation Style and his severed limbs start flying around and beating Chang Yi Tao to a pulp. It's a mesmerizing scene and, as far as I'm concerned, one of the great highlights of old school kung fu choreography.

Had the rest of the movie had the same level of wacky energy seen in those last 10 minutes, *Young Taoism Fighter* would be a bonafide classic. Don't get me wrong, the film as a whole is insane on a number of levels. After all, how many Hollywood movies out there feature dancing box turtles, spells that cause children to piss in a bucket and grow old, and a fight that involves disembodied limbs flying about? But where the earlier entries were Klaus Kinski crazy, *Young Taoism Fighter* is more like Nicolas Cage: kind of bland at times, but every once in a while it just gives us all it's got and serves up a storm of hammy weirdness. It needed more fights and more strange characters with unbelievable weapons and esoteric kung fu styles. It's certainly not a bad entry in the weird-fu sub-genre, but it could've been a lot more.

**Young Vagabond, The (Hong Kong, 1985: Lau Shut-Yue)** - Two brash students Su Chan and his step brother Su Jia Bao become involved in a plot to rob the Taifeng Bank. Su Chan, who enjoys drinking, is secretly trained by his literary teacher, Liang Hung. Formerly known as the Drunken Tiger, Liang, now an honorable man, is hiding out in autonomy from his former partner, the sadistic rapist/kung fu expert Wu Gong. After several shocking incidents, Su Chan, who now has assumed his historically famous persona of Beggar Su the drunk, attacks Wu Gong and his gang in a final confrontation.

An interesting movie about real life hero Beggar Su, one of the Ten KwangTung Tigers and his days as a young man dealing with foreign influence in his homeland leading up to his inevitable transformation into a drunken master of the martial arts. The first hour is a meandering series of light hearted comical sequences that mine similar territory to Liu Chia Liang's *My Young Auntie* (1980) which detailed pervasive Anglo influences in Chinese society. Here, it's a bit more omnipresent in the way the young speak (they even have an English teacher), the games they play and the Taifeng Bank has a special foreign security system should the place ever be robbed.

Liu Chia Hui is good as always playing Beggar Su who, according to the film, has been enamored with wine since he was a toddler. I'm not sure how historically accurate the film is, but you really don't learn a whole lot about the

character save for his fascination with alcohol. The comedic elements dominate most of the first hour but the film turns unexpectedly nasty during the last 25 minutes leading up to Liu doing battle with Wu Gong in a pretty brutal fight that's all over the place culminating in a final shot that recalls *The Thundering Mantis* (1979).

The western aura extends to the action scenes which seemingly does away with traditional Chinese martial arts styles and adopts a more rough, less articulate boxing style for the fights. Whether this was due to the implications of the plot involving curiosity over foreign trappings or simply to copy what Jacky Chan and the GH crew were doing is debatable. Either way, the fights are good and brutal most specially the final half of the film.

Wong Yu hasn't much of a role here aside from being the more promiscuous of the two ultimately getting himself in a dire situation towards the end. He only has one so-so fight during the attempted bank robbery which was a rather nice scene in itself.

Wang Lung Wei, for what little time he gets as per his late entry into the film, steals the show away from everybody else in his portrayal as the clean-obsessed rapist/murderer kung fu master. Shaw's were always good at producing some seriously depraved and downright evil villains, and Wang's Wu Gong is no exception. Some of the violence perpetrated on some of the cast is startling and one or two instances you don't see it coming.

Pai Piao as Liang Hong, the former partner to Wu Gong, is also an asset to the film. Pai has a stoic quality about him similar to Ti Lung and he can convey a believability to either heroic or villainous roles and here, his scenes training the young Su Chan reminds me of the *Rocky* films especially the montage including a slow motion run along a beach.

Ku Feng has a throwaway role as Detective Iron Tooth and is around to do nothing more than provide some comic relief to pad the film out until the main action arrives. Admittedly, I got a good chuckle out of the dinner scene with Iron Tooth's family and Su Chan. Other than that, his appearance was a bit wasted.

Kuan Feng fares much less. He plays Master Bai, Wu Gong's new partner in crime. He doesn't get to do much action though, and that's a shame. During the end I was expecting Beggar So to tackle both villains at the same time, but seeing how it plays out, Master Bai isn't much of a master as he attempts to abscond with Wu's share of the assets from the stolen winery resulting in a swift death from Wu.

Director Liu Shi-yu handles much of the film very well in my opinion and possibly studio pressure kept him from turning this curiosity piece into a truly great movie. Liu directed the highly dramatic and wonderfully *New Tales of the Flying Fox* (1984). Some very beautiful scenes in that movie and some of that translates here but it's a bit uneven at times although I did enjoy this movie, I couldn't help but wonder how much better it could have been had Shaw's not lost so much of their audience by this time. They still churned out some great movies, but far too many misteps and films that were just going through the motions dominate much of their 83-85 output.

Overall, *The Young Vagabond* (1985) is an enjoyable enough time waster and has some memorable spots. Shaw completists will find this worthy of a purchase. All others would do best to rent first before buying.

**Zen Kwan Do Strikes in Paris (Taiwan, 1980: John Liu) - aka Kung Fu Leung Strikes Emmanuelle** - Half an hour into the film John Liu summarises his predicament with one of the best dubbed lines I've ever heard in a kung fu movie; 'Whats going on ? Catharine's dead, Natalie's a nun, my father is kidnapped, now I can't see Natalie or find out where my daughter is'. This is a good indication of just how little sense the plot of this film makes. None of these questions are actually ever resolved but that doesn't matter as the fighting is really the main focus here.

When John Liu, playing himself (yes, as John Liu the film star) travels to Paris to investigate the kidnap of his father (who works as a scientist for NASA!?! ) he finds that getting the answer to 'whats going on' is a lot more difficult than just beating up American karate champions and bell bottomed westerners. Not suprisingly he opts for the latter and seems to give up looking for his father altogether. Secretly keeping a watchful eye is Interpol police officer Alan Hsu; not playing himself but also bell bottomed (as is Tino Wong who makes a brief cameo as a thug).

Actually this film is great fun, sometimes for all the wrong reasons but often for the wickedly entertaining fight scenes. Given the modern setting, traditional style moves are replaced by more realistic (well...slightly) martial arts moves. Great kicking as always from John Liu in a film that really showcases his talents as a martial artist. The final showdown, set on a private yacht and where John Liu fights former full contact world champion Roger Paschey, is particularly well executed and could be considered one of John's best.

**Zen Master 6 (Hong Kong, 1987: Lo Lieh)** - This isn't quite a Mainland film, but it might as well be. Lo Lieh directs this last-ditch attempt to cash in on whatever success Chinese wushu films in the *Shaolin Temple* vein were having by the late 80s. I can't imagine much, at least in Hong Kong. The story actually subverts some of the usual conventions of the genre. Wai Nam is a child when his parents (his dad a retired official) are murdered by bandits. Wai Nam is left at the Shaolin Temple, where he grows up and learns kung fu. Usually, a kid like this would grow up full of anger, like Angela Mao in *Broken Oath* or Jet Li in *Martial Arts of Shaolin*. Wai Nam, on the other hand, understands Buddhism more than his peers, including his senior brother (and bully) San Sau.

When the abbot is on the verge of leaving his life, he arranges for a series of tests to determine who will be the next leader. San Sau bests Wai Nam in the kung fu tournament, but the abbot notices Wai Nam's humility and chooses him to be his successor. His first mission is go on a journey throughout the world to spread Buddhism to the populace. When San Sau discovers that Wai Nam has left the temple with some sutra in hand, he stops at nothing to get it back and cement his power at the temple.

The plot reminded me of an inversion of *Holy Robe of Shaolin*, which was neat. I did find it weird, however, that our hero doesn't think twice about killing in self-defense. Contrast that with the monks in *Eight Diagram Pole Fighter*, who opt to bash their enemies' teeth out rather than kill. But then again, what choice do you have when you leave the temple with a sword instead of a pole or something blunt?

The action was directed by Yuen Bun. I was hoping that under Lo Lieh's direction and that working with a bunch of Mainland wushu stylists, this would be Yuen Bun's grand contribution to onscreen martial arts and hand-to-hand combat. It isn't, but it's not bad. It's mainly hand-to-hand (no real identifiable styles) and weapons (sword and broadsword, with a smattering of chain whip at the end). The wire tricks are awkward and out of place, but don't detract too much from the action. There's a certain lack of manic intensity that keeps the fights from soaring to greater heights, as if they were technically sound but lacking in emotion. Nonetheless, fans should easily find something to enjoy here.

**Zodiac Fighters (Taiwan, 1978: Hou Cheng)** - ZODIAC FIGHTERS is an obscure, cheap, Taiwanese kung fu fantasy movie based around the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac. The rag-tag storyline sees female fighter Polly Shang Kwan coming up against a ruthless warlord and into possession of a magical sword, but the main thrust of the narrative involves twelve fighters, each of whom are embodied by the spirit of one of the zodiac signs. Thus there's a silly rooster-costume guy, a monkey fighter, and the like. The action here is plentiful but very cheaply staged and the costumes are largely gaudy and rubbish-looking, factors which sap the film of its enjoyment factor even as a so-bad-it's-good picture. Lo Lieh appears in the final reel as his customary master villain, and he has the worst wig ever.



## **Index and Authorship**

1. Ace of swordsman (ShawAngela)
2. Adventure at Shaolin (So Good Reviews)
3. Adventure for Imperial Treasure (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
4. Against the Drunken Cat's Paw (Blake Matthews)
5. All Men Are Brothers (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
6. Ambitious Kung Fu Girl (Wasted Life)
7. Amsterdam Connection (So Good Reviews)
8. Angry Guest (Killer Meteor)
9. Angry Hero (So Good Reviews)
10. Angry River (Blake Matthews)
11. Angry Tiger (panku)
12. Angry Young Man (Blake Matthews)
13. Anonymous Heroes (Master of One Inch Punch)
14. Arhats in Fury (So Good Reviews)
15. Art of War by Sun Tzu (Keith Allison)
16. Assassin (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
17. Assassinator (ShawAngela)
18. Assault of Final Rival (Shaolin Chamber)
19. Association (Takuma/kungfuandcoffee)
20. Attack of the Joyful Goddess (Keith Allison)
21. Avenging Eagle (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
22. Avenging Sword (ShawAngela)
23. Awaken Punch (PaiMeiFist)
24. Back Alley Princes (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
25. Bandits from Shantung (So Good Reviews)
26. Bastard (Wasted Life)
27. Battle Wizard (So Good Reviews)
28. Beach of the War Gods (Secret Executioner)
29. Beautiful Swordsman (So Good Reviews)
30. Beauty Escort (DVD Talk – Gil Jawetz)
31. Bells of Death (So Good Reviews)
32. Best of Shaolin Kung Fu (Wasted Life)
33. Betrayal and Revenge (Blake Matthews)
34. Big Boss (Fist of Heavenly Sky)
35. Big Boss of Shanghai (Wasted Life)
36. Big Boss Part 2 (Michael Worth)
37. Big Boss II (Killer Meteor)
38. Big Family (Godfrey Ho Worshipper)
39. Big Fight (Blake Matthews)
40. Big Rascal (Wasted Life)
41. Black and White Umbrella (ShawAngela)
42. Black Belt (ShawAngela)
43. Black Belt Karate (Wasted Life)
44. Black Butterfly (So Good Reviews)
45. Black Dragon's Revenge (DragonClaws)
46. Black Enforcer (Venoms5)
47. Black Justice (IMDB – ckormos1)
48. Black Society (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
49. Black Tavern (So Good Reviews)
50. Blazing Temple (Wasted Life)
51. Blind Boxer (So Good Reviews)
52. Blind Fist of Bruce (Secret Executioner)
53. Blood Brothers (Yves Gendron)
54. Blood and Guts (Keith Allison)
55. Blood Child (Kung Fu DVD – Tony Mustafa)
56. Blood of Dragon Peril (So Good Reviews)
57. Blood of the Leopard (ShawAngela)
58. Blooded Treasury Fight (Blake Matthews)
59. Bloody Escape (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
60. Bloody Hero (Atherton)

61. Bloody Mask of Karate (ShawAngela)
62. Bold Three (NoKungFuForYu)
63. Bone-Crushing Kid (Morgoth Bauglir)
64. Born Invincible (CrazyFrog)
65. Boxer from Shantung (Wasted Life)
66. Boxer from the Temple (Wasted Life)
67. Boxer Rebellion (Blake Matthews)
68. Boxer's Adventure (DragonClaws)
69. Boxer's Omen (M.H. Boroson)
70. Brave and the Evil (IMDB – squelcho)
71. Brave Archer, Part 1 (Wasted Life)
72. Brave Archer 3 (Far East Films – Andrew Saroch)
73. Bravest Fist (DragonClaws)
74. Bravest Revenge (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
75. Breakout from Oppression (So Good Reviews)
76. Broken Oath (Blake Matthews)
77. Bronze Head and Steel Arm (ShawAngela)
78. Brotherhood of Heroes (IMDB – Leofwine\_draca)
79. Bruce and Dragon Fist (IMDB – Leofwine\_draca)
80. Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu (DragonClaws)
81. Bruce & Shaolin Kung Fu Part 2 (DragonClaws)
82. Bruce and the Iron Finger (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
83. Bruce and the Shaolin Bronzemen (Brucesploitation – William)
84. Bruce, King of Kung Fu (Master of One Inch Punch)
85. Bruce, Kung Fu Girls (The Spinning Image)
86. Bruce Le's Greatest Revenge (Killer Meteor)
87. Bruce Lee: A Dragon Story (Keith Allison)
88. Bruce Lee Against Supermen (HKMDB – Gaijin84)
89. Bruce Lee and I (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
90. Bruce Lee Fights Back from the Grave (AlbertV)
91. Bruce Lee, Superstar (So Good Reviews)
92. Bruce Lee, the Invincible (mpm74)
93. Bruce Lee – The True Story (So Good Reviews)
94. Bruce Lee, We Miss You (Opposable Thumb Films)
95. Bruce Lee in New Guinea (Secret Executioner)
96. Bruce Strikes Back (Blake Matthews)
97. Bruce Takes Dragon Town (Brucesploitation – William)
98. Bruce the Superhero (AlbertV)
99. Bruce Tuan – 7 Promises (So Good Reviews)
100. Bruce vs. Bill (IMDB – InjunNose)
101. Bruce's Deadly Fingers (Blake Matthews)
102. Bruce's Fist of Vengeance (Brucesploitation – William)
103. Brutal Boxer (So Good Reviews)
104. Brutal Sorcery (So Good Reviews)
105. Buddha Assassinator (Blake Matthews)
106. Buddha's Palm (So Good Reviews)
107. Buddhist Fist (Badmovies.org)
108. Buddhist Fist and Tiger's Claws (Paul Bramhall)
109. Butterfly 18 (Wasted Life)
110. By Hook or by Crook (HKMDB – cal42)
111. Calamity of Snakes (Blake Matthews)
112. Call Him Mr. Shatter (Yves Gendron)
113. Cannibals (ShawAngela)
114. Canton Viper (Wasted Life)
115. Cantonen Iron Kung Fu (So Good Reviews)
116. Casino (Venoms5)
117. Cat vs. Rat (LuFengLover)
118. Cavalier (PaiMeiFist)
119. Centipede Horror (Blake Matthews)
120. Challenge of Death (Blake Matthews)
121. Challenge of the Lady Ninja (Nathan Shumate)
122. Challenge of the Gamesters (Wasted Life)



123. Challenge of the Masters (will\_silver)
124. Challenge of the Tiger (So Good Reviews)
125. Challenge the Dragon (Killer Meteor)
126. Challenger (PaiMeiFist)
127. Champ Against Champ (Paul Bramhall)
128. Champion of the Boxers (ShawAngela)
129. Champions (Blake Matthews)
130. Chase (So Good Reviews)
131. Chase Step by Step (DragonClaws)
132. Cheeky Chap (So Good Reviews)
133. Child of Peach (Blake Matthews)
134. Chinatown Kid (mpm74)
135. Chinese Boxer (Killer Meteor)
136. Chinese Godfather (So Good Reviews)
137. Chinese Kung Fu Against Godfather (Blake Matthews)
138. Chinese Puzzle for a Judo Fighter (ShawAngela)
139. Chinese Stuntman (Killer Meteor)
140. Chivalrous Inn (Alex-in-Wonderland)
141. Chivalry Deadly Feud (ShawAngela)
142. Chivalry, the Gunman and the Killer (So Good Reviews)
143. Choy Li Fat Kung Fu (Wasted Life)
144. Chu Liu Xiang and the Finger Flicking Skill (ShawAngela)
145. City Called Dragon (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
146. Clan Feuds (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
147. Clan of the White Lotus (So Good Reviews)
148. Clones of Bruce Lee (Secret Executioner)
149. Club (TibetanWhiteCrane)
150. Cold Wind Hands (NoKungFuforYu)
151. Come Drink with Me (venoms5)
152. Comet Strikes (So Good Reviews)
153. Conspiracy of Thieves (Blake Matthews)
154. Crane Fighter (Blake Matthews)
155. Crazy Acrobat (HKMDB – Bruce)
156. Crazy Guy With Super Kung Fu (PaiMeiFist)
157. Crazy Horse, Intelligent Monkey (PaiMeiFist)
158. Crazy Shaolin Disciples (ShawAngela)
159. Crippled Avengers (Blake Matthews)
160. Crippled Masters (Nathan Shumate)
161. Crush (ShawAngela)
162. Crystal Fist (Blake Matthews)
163. Cub Tiger from Kwangtung (So Good Reviews)
164. Damned (PaiMeiFist)
165. Dance of Death (Wasted Life)
166. Dance of the Drunk Mantis (Blake Matthews)
167. Dark Lady of Kung Fu (So Good Reviews)
168. Darkest Sword (ShawAngela)
169. Dead and the Deadly (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
170. Deadly Angels (So Good Reviews)
171. Deadly Breaking Sword (PaiMeiFist)
172. Deadly China Doll (Alex in Wonderland)
173. Deadly Confrontation (IMDB – leofwine\_draca)
174. Deadly Duo (Killer Meteor)
175. Deadly Knives (venoms5)
176. Deadly Secret (So Good Reviews)
177. Deadly Silver Spear (Wasted Life)
178. Deadly Strike (So Good Reviews)
179. Deaf Mute Heroine (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
180. Death Cage (Blake Matthews)
181. Death Duel (Wasted Life)
182. Death Duel of Kung Fu (PaiMeiFist)
183. Death Duel of Mantis (DragonClaws)
184. Death on the Docks (So Good Reviews)

185. Death Ring (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
186. Delightful Forest (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
187. Demon Strike (Blake Matthews)
188. Desperate Chase (So Good Reviews)
189. Desperate Killer (IMDB – mushroomginseng)
190. Devil and Angel (So Good Reviews)
191. Devil Killer (PaiMeiFist)
192. Devil's Mirror (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
193. Devil's Treasure (mpm74)
194. Dirty Kung Fu (Wasted Life)
195. Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog (HKMDB – MrBooth)
196. Disciples of Shaolin Temple (Blake Matthews)
197. Disciples of Shaolin (So Good Reviews)
198. Disciples of the 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber (Shaolin Chamber)
199. Dog King and Snake King (ShawAngela)
200. Double Crossers (PaiMeiFist)
201. Dragon Creek (AgriWuxia)
202. Dragon Fist (Scott Blasingame)
203. Dragon Force (Bruceploitation – Wuxia)
204. Dragon Fortress (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
205. Dragon Fury (ShawAngela)
206. Dragon Gate Inn (DragonClaws)
207. Dragon Lives Again (Blake Matthews)
208. Dragon Lord (HKMDB – cal42)
209. Dragon Missile (PaiMeiFist)
210. Dragon on the Shaolin Tower (IMDB – leofwine\_draca)
211. Dragon Squad (Wasted Life)
212. Dragon Swamp (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
213. Dragon, the Hero (The Moose)
214. Dragon, the Lizard and the Boxer (Blake Matthews)
215. Dragon, the Young Hero (DragonClaws)
216. Dragon's Blood (HKMDB – Frank Lakatos)
217. Dragon's Claws (Killer Meteor)
218. Dragon's Infernal Showdown (DragonClaws)
219. Dragon's Snake Fist (Shaolin Chamber)
220. Dreadnaught (James Chang)
221. Dream Sword (So Good Reviews)
222. Drunken Arts and Crippled Fist (Blake Matthews)
223. Drunken Master (Scott Ashlin)
224. Drunken Master, Slippery Snake (Blake Matthews)
225. Drunken Master Strikes Back (Wasted Life)
226. Drunken Tai Chi (Wasted Life)
227. Dual Flying Kicks (DVD Talk – J. Doyle Wallis)
228. Duel (mpm74)
229. Duel at Black Dunes (ShawAngela)
230. Duel at the Supreme Gate (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
231. Duel at Tiger Village (DragonClaws)
232. Duel for Gold (So Good Reviews)
233. Duel of Fists (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
234. Duel of Karate (Blake Matthews)
235. Duel of the Masters (Badmovies.org)
236. Duel of the 7 Tigers (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
237. Duel of the Tough (Shaolin Chamber 36)
238. Duel of the Ultimate Weapons (Wasted Life)
239. Duel to the Death (PaiMeiFist)
240. Duel with Samurai (ShawAngela)
241. Duel with the Devil (So Good Reviews)
242. Duel with the Devils (HKMDB – ewaffle)
243. Dynamite Shaolin Heroes (PaiMeiFist)
244. Dynamite Trio (Wasted Life)
245. Dynamo (Blake Matthews)
246. Dynasty (Blake Matthews)

247. Eagle vs. Silver Fox (Blake Matthews)  
248. Eagle's Claw (ShawAngela)  
249. Eagle's Claws (Yves Gendron)  
250. Eagle's Killer (So Good Reviews)  
251. Edge of Fury (mpm74)  
252. Eight Diagram Cudgel (IMDB – Eagle Claw)  
253. Eight Diagram Lotus Palm (Blake Matthews)  
254. Eight Diagram Pole Fighter (Keith Allison)  
255. Eight Dragon Swords (So Good Reviews)  
256. Eight Escorts (IMDB – Brian Camp)  
257. 8 Masters (Wasted Life)  
258. 8 Strikes of the Wildcat (Wasted Life)  
259. 18 Bronzegirls of Shaolin (So Good Reviews)  
260. 18 Bronzemen (Wasted Life)  
261. 18 Fatal Strikes (Secret Executioner)  
262. Eighteen Jade Arhats (Teleport City – Rob Ray)  
263. 18 Swirling Riders (PaiMeiFist)  
264. Emperor and his Brother (Wasted Life)  
265. Enchantress (PaiMeiFist)  
266. Encounter of the Spooky Kind (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
267. End of the Wicked Tigers (IMDB – Brian Camp)  
268. Enter the Dragon (Nathan Shumate)  
269. Enter the Fat Dragon (Silver and Gold Dragon)  
270. Enter the Game of Death (Master of One Inch Punch)  
271. Enter the Invincible Hero (Paul Bramhall)  
272. Enter the Panther (Brucesploitation)  
273. Enter Three Dragons (Blake Matthews)  
274. Escape (IMDB – ckormos1)  
275. Evidence (ShawAngela)  
276. Evil Hits Evil (Paul Bramhall)  
277. Excelsior (ShawAngela)  
278. Executioners of Shaolin (ShaOW!linDude)  
279. Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger (Wasted Life)  
280. Face Behind the Mask (So Good Reviews)  
281. Fantasy Mission Force (Keith Allison)  
282. Fatal Flying Guillotines (PaiMeiFist)  
283. Fatal Needles vs Fatal Fists  
284. Fate of Lee Khan (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
285. Fearless Duo (DragonClaws)  
286. Fearless Fighters (So Good Reviews)  
287. Fearless Hyena  
288. Fearless Young Boxer  
289. Female Chivalry (Bruce Long)  
290. Female Fugitive  
291. Fierce Fist  
292. Fight Among the Supers  
293. Fight for Shaolin Tamo Mystique (Shaolin Chamber)  
294. Fighting Ace (Blake Matthews)  
295. Fighting Fists of Shanghai Joe (Keith Allison)  
296. Fighting Fool  
297. Fighting of Shaolin Monk  
298. Filthy Guy (Killer Meteor)  
299. Fingers that Kill  
300. Fist of Dragon  
301. Fist of Fury 2 (Blake Matthews)  
302. Fist of Fury III (Blake Matthews)  
303. Fist that Kills (ShawAngela)  
304. Fist to Fist  
305. Fistful of Talons  
306. Fists and Guts  
307. Fists, Kicks and Evil  
308. Fists of Bruce Lee (So Good Reviews)

309. Five Deadly Venoms (Scott Blasingame)
310. Five Element Ninjas
311. Five Fighters from Shaolin
312. Five Pattern Dragon Claws (DragonClaws)
313. Five Shaolin Masters (Blake Matthews)
314. Five Venoms vs. Wu Tang
315. Flag of Iron
316. Flash Future Kung Fu
317. Fly Dragon Mountain (So Good Reviews)
318. Flying Dagger
319. Flying Guillotine
320. Flying Guillotine 2
321. Flying Killer (So Good Reviews)
322. Flying Over Grass (ShawAngela)
323. Flying Swallow
324. Forbidden Killing (ShawAngela)
325. Four Hands of Death (Morgoth Bauglir)
326. Four Invincible
327. Four Riders
328. Four Shaolin Challengers (Hong Kong Film Net)
329. 14 Amazons
330. Friends (Shaolin Chamber)
331. From the Highway (Wasted Life)
332. Fugitive (Venoms5)
333. Furious
334. Furious Dragon (ShawAngela)
335. Furious Slaughter
336. Fury of King Boxer
337. Gambling for Head (IMDB)
338. Game of Death (Blake Matthews)
339. Gang Master (HKMDB – MrBooth)
340. General Stone (PaiMeiFist)
341. Ghost Hill (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
342. Ghostly Face (Paul Bramhall)
343. Ghosts Galore (The Spinning Image)
344. Girl Called Tigress (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
345. Girl Fighter (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
346. Godfather Squad (DragonClaws)
347. Gold Hunters (Morgoth Bauglir)
348. Golden Dart Hero (Blake Matthews)
349. Golden Destroyers (Keith Allison)
350. Golden Knight (Tex Killer)
351. Golden Lion (So Good Reviews)
352. Golden Mask (Shaolin Chamber)
353. Golden Sabre (ShawAngela)
354. Golden Swallow (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
355. Golden Sword (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
356. Golden Triangle (So Good Reviews)
357. Goose Boxer (Master of One Inch Punch)
358. Grandmaster of Death (Blake Matthews)
359. Grandmaster of Shaolin Kung Fu (Shaolin Chamber)
360. Great Conspiracy (Gotterdamerung - Branislav L. Slantchev)
361. Great Hunter (So Good Reviews)
362. Greatest Thai Boxing (So Good Reviews)
363. Green Dragon Inn (Blake Matthews)
364. Green Jade Statuette (Wasted Life)
365. Guy with Secret Kung Fu (Blake Matthews)
366. Half a Loaf of Kung Fu (Killer Meteor)
367. Handcuff (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
368. Hands of Death (DragonClaws)
369. Hapkido (Master of One Inch Punch)
370. Hard as a Dragon (So Good Reviews)

371. Hard Bastard (Blake Matthews)
372. Hard Man with Guts (ShawAngela)
373. Have Sword, Will Travel (DVD Talk – Ian Jane)
374. He Has Nothing But Kung Fu (Yves Gendron)
375. He Walks like a Tiger (Odiousstrident/Opium Kung Fu Cracker)
376. Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre (Shaolin Chamber)
377. Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre Part 2 (Blake Matthews)
378. Heinous Fiend (ShawAngela)
379. Hell's Wind Staff (Blake Matthews)
380. Hero of the Heroes (ShawAngela)
381. Hero of the Time (IMDB – Shandalson)
382. Hero of the Waterfront (Blake Matthews)
383. Hero Tattooed with Nine Dragons (Amazon - gd31358w)
384. Heroes of Sung (Shaolin Chamber)
385. Heroes of the Wild (Blake Matthews)
386. Heroes of the East (Drunken Monk)
387. Heroes of the Late Ming Dynasty (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)
388. Heroes Two (PaiMeiFist)
389. Heroic Ones (Secret Executioner)
390. Heroine (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)
391. Heroine Kan Lien Chu (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)
392. Heroine of Tribulation (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)
393. Heroine Susan, The Sister of the Shantung Boxer (So Good Reviews)
394. Hidden Hero (So Good Reviews)
395. Hidden Power of Dragon Sabre (Tex Killer)
396. Himalayan (Blake Matthews)
397. Hitman in the Hand of Buddha (Morgoth Bauglir)
398. Hocus Pocus (Master of One Inch Punch)
399. Holy Robe of Shaolin Temple (Wasted Life)
400. Horse Boxing Killer (Killer Meteor)
401. Hot, the Cool, and the Vicious (Yves Gendron)
402. Human Lanterns (Writ)
403. Hurricane (So Good Reviews)
404. I Will Finally Knock You Down, Dad (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
405. I'll Get You One Day (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
406. Ill Wind (NoKungFuorYu)
407. Image of Bruce Lee (Fist of the Heavenly Sky)
408. Immortal Warriors (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
409. Imperial Sword (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
410. Imperial Sword, Crouching Devil (So Good Reviews)
411. Imposter (Venoms5)
412. Imprudent Iron Phoenix (FLK Cinema – RTF600)
413. In the Beginning (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
414. Incredible Kung Fu Master (City on Fire – Martin Sandison)
415. Incredible Kung Fu Mission (Wasted Life)
416. Incredible Shaolin Thunderkick (So Good Reviews)
417. Infernal Street (DragonClaws)
418. Inheritor of Kung Fu (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
419. Instant Kung Fu Man (Far East Films)
420. Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
421. Invincible (So Good Reviews)
422. Invincible Armour (CrazyFrog)
423. Invincible Eight (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
424. Invincible Enforcer (mpm74)
425. Invincible Fist (AgriWuxia)
426. Invincible Kung Fu (IMDB – ckormos1)
427. Invincible Kung Fu Trio (Wasted Life)
428. Invincible Obsessed Fighter (DragonClaws)
429. Invincible Shaolin (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)
430. Invincible Super Chan (Wasted Life)
431. Invincible Super Guy (So Good Reviews)
432. Invisible Terrorist (PaiMeiFist)

433. Iron Dragon Strikes Back (DragonClaws)  
434. Iron-Fisted Eagle's Claws (Blake Matthews)  
435. Iron Fisted Monk (Scott Blasingame)  
436. Iron Man (aka Chinese Iron Man)  
437. Iron Man (aka A Dollar a Fist)  
438. Iron Mistress (So Good Reviews)  
439. Iron Monkey (Blake Matthews)  
440. Iron Neck Li (Lu Feng Lover)  
441. Iron Ox (So Good Reviews)  
442. Iron Swallow (DragonClaws)  
443. Jackie and Bruce to the Rescue (shaolintemple)  
444. Jade Bow (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
445. Jade Dragon (ShawAngela)  
446. Jade-Faced Assassin (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
447. Jade Fox (IMDB – Joe Dog)  
448. Jade Tiger (Wasted Life)  
449. Journey of the Doomed (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
450. Judgment of an Assassin (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)  
451. Judicial Sword (IMDB – ckormos1)  
452. Karate Story (ShawAngela)  
453. Kid from Kwantung (Venoms5)  
454. Kid with the Golden Arm (Wasted Life)  
455. Kidnap in Rome (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
456. Killer (Wasted Life)  
457. Killer Army (Blake Matthews)  
458. Killer Clans (ShawAngela)  
459. Killer Constable (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)  
460. Killer Darts (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
461. Killer from Above (Wasted Life)  
462. Killer Meteors (Master of One Inch Punch)  
463. Killing Sword (ShawAngela)  
464. King Boxer (Blake Matthews)  
465. King Eagle (Tex Killer)  
466. King of Fists and Dollars (ShawAngela)  
467. Kings of Blade and Sword (ShawAngela)  
468. Knife of Devil's Roaring and Souls Missing (Blake Matthews)  
469. Knight Errant (Keith Allison)  
470. Knockabout (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
471. Kung Fu Arts (DragonClaws)  
472. Kung Fu Brothers in the Wild West (Morgoth Bauglir)  
473. Kung Fu Emperor (Wasted Life)  
474. Kung Fu from Beyond the Grave (Blake Matthews)  
475. Kung Fu Genius (Kokuryuha)  
476. Kung Fu Girl (Master of One Inch Punch)  
477. Kung Fu Girls (Secret Executioner)  
478. Kung Fu Instructor (Blake Matthews)  
479. Kung Fu Kid (Cheng Li)  
480. Kung Fu Kids Break Away (Golden Dragon Yin-Yang)  
481. Kung Fu Master Named Drunk Cat (Blake Matthews)  
482. Kung Fu of 8 Drunkards (Blake Matthews)  
483. Kung Fu vs. Yoga (Wasted Life)  
484. Kung Fu Zombie (Keith Allison)  
485. Lackey and the Lady Tiger (Blake Matthews)  
486. Lady Assassin (AgriWuxia)  
487. Lady Constables (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
488. Lady Hermit (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
489. Lady is the Boss (Wasted Life)  
490. Lady Karate (IMDB – Brian Camp)  
491. Lady Professional (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
492. Lady Snake Fist (Blake Matthews)  
493. Lady Whirlwind (Blake Matthews)  
494. Lady Whirlwind and the Rangers (Monsters at Play)

495. Lady with a Sword (ShawAngela)
496. Lama Avengers (Brucesploitation – William)
497. Last Fist of Fury (Blake Matthews)
498. Last Hurrah for Chivalry (CrazyFrog)
499. Last Strike (Keith Allison)
500. Leg Fighters (Blake Matthews)
501. Legend of a Fighter (CrazyFrog)
502. Legend of the Fox (Tex Killer)
503. Legend of the Owl (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
504. Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires (Yves Gendron)
505. Legendary Strike (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
506. Legendary Weapons of China (Master of One Inch Punch)
507. Leopard Fist Ninja (DragonClaws)
508. Life Gamble (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)
509. Life of Ninja (Blake Matthews)
510. Lion vs. Lion (Blake Matthews)
511. Little Hero (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
512. Little Hero of Shaolin Temple (Nathan Shumate)
513. Little Mad Guy (Keith Allison)
514. Little Superman (Wasted Life)
515. Living Sword (ShawAngela)
516. Lizard (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
517. Long Road to Gallantry (Paul Bramhall)
518. Loot (Wasted Life)
519. Lost Kung Fu Secrets (Nathan Shumate)
520. Lost Swordship (Keith Allison)
521. Lotus Camp (ShawAngela)
522. Lust for Love of a Chinese Courtesan (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)
523. Mad Cold-Blooded Murder (Brucesploitation – Keith)
524. Mad Killer (ShawAngela)
525. Mad Monkey Kung Fu (Prodigal Son)
526. Mafia vs. Ninja (Shaolin Chamber)
527. Magic Beggar (Blake Matthews)
528. Magic Blade (Master of One Inch Punch)
529. Magic of Spell (Blake Matthews)
530. Magic Warriors (Blake Matthews)
531. Magnificent (Secret Executioner)
532. Magnificent Bodyguards (So Good Reviews)
533. Magnificent Butcher (DragonClaws)
534. Magnificent Chivalry (So Good Reviews)
535. Magnificent Ruffians (Blake Matthews)
536. Magnificent Swordsman (NoKungFuForYu)
537. Magnificent Trio (So Good Reviews)
538. Magnificent Wonderman (Wasted Life)
539. Magnum Fist (Brucesploitation)
540. Man Called Tiger (Blake Matthews)
541. Man from Hong Kong (SamuraiDana)
542. Mantis Fist and Tiger Claws of Shaolin (10,000 Bullets – Michael Den Boer)
543. Mantis Under Falcon Claws (Secret Executioner)
544. Marco Polo (Wasted Life)
545. Mar's Villa (DragonClaws)
546. Marshes of Liang Shan Po (So Good Reviews)
547. Martial Arts (Secret Executioner)
548. Martial Arts of Shaolin (KenHashibe)
549. Martial Club (Wasted Life)
550. Martial Hero (So Good Reviews)
551. Martial Monks of Shaolin Temple (Paul Bramhall)
552. Marvelous Stunts of Kung Fu (Secret Executioner)
553. Mask Heroine (So Good Reviews)
554. Masked Avengers (Tex Killer)
555. Massacre Survivor (So Good Reviews)
556. Master and the Kid (PaiMeiFist)

557. Master Killers (Morgoth Bauglir)  
558. Master of Kung Fu (LoveHKfilm)  
559. Master Strikes (KenHashibe)  
560. Master Strikes Back (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)  
561. Master with Cracked Fingers (So Good Reviews)  
562. Matching Escort (Black Matthews)  
563. Mean Streets of Kung Fu (So Good Reviews)  
564. Men from the Gutter (Venoms5)  
565. Men from the Monastery (Blake Matthews)  
566. Middle Kingdom Mark of Blood (ShawAngela)  
567. Mighty Couple (ShawAngela)  
568. Mighty Four (Wasted Life)  
569. Mighty One (Tex Killer)  
570. Ming Patriots (Blake Matthews)  
571. Miracle Fighters (Blake Matthews)  
572. Miraculous Flower (Blake Matthews)  
573. Mission for the Dragon (Paul Bramhall)  
574. Mission Kiss and Kill (So Good Reviews)  
575. Monkey Fist (So Good Reviews)  
576. Monkey Fist, Floating Snake (Shaolin Chamber)  
577. Monkey Wife (ShawAngela)  
578. Monk's Fight (So Good Reviews)  
579. Moon Night Cutter (So Good Reviews)  
580. Moonlight Sword and Jade Lion (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
581. Murky Shadows Over the Gorges (Blake Matthews)  
582. My Blade, My Life (So Good Reviews)  
583. My Kung Fu 12 Kicks (Wasted Life)  
584. My Life's on the Line (PaiMeiFist)  
585. My Name Called Bruce (So Good Reviews)  
586. My Rebellious Son (KenHashibe)  
587. My Young Auntie (Wasted Life)  
588. Mysterious Heroes (IMDB – Brian Camp)  
589. Mysterious Knight (So Good Reviews)  
590. Mystery of Chess Boxing (Wasted Life)  
591. Na Cha and the Seven Devils (So Good Reviews)  
592. Na Cha the Great (So Good Reviews)  
593. Naval Commandos (LuFengLover)  
594. New Fist of Fury (Scott Blasingame)  
595. New Game of Death (Wasted Life)  
596. New One-Armed Swordsman (Wasted Life)  
597. New Pilgrims to the West (So Good Reviews)  
598. Nine Demons (Wasted Life)  
599. 99 Cycling Swords (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
600. Ninja Avenger (DragonClaws)  
601. Ninja Holocaust (Paul Bramhall)  
602. Ninja Hunter (Wasted Life)  
603. Ninja in Ancient China (CrazyFrog)  
604. Ninja in the Claws of the CIA (Spinning Image – Andrew Pragasam)  
605. Ninja in the Deadly Trap (Wasted Life)  
606. Ninja in the Dragon's Den (Master of One Inch Punch)  
607. Ninja Over the Great Wall (Blake Matthews)  
608. Ninja: The Final Duel (Wasted Life)  
609. Ninja vs. Bruce Lee (So Good Reviews)  
610. Ninja vs. the Shaolin Guards (Wasted Life)  
611. None but the Brave (So Good Reviews)  
612. Notorious Eight (Wasted Life)  
613. Oath of Death  
614. Odd Couple (Shaolin Chamber)  
615. Ode to Gallantry (Shaolin Chamber)  
616. Of Cooks and Kung Fu  
617. One the Verge of Death  
618. One-Armed Boxer



619. One-Armed Swordsman  
620. One-Armed Swordsman Against the 9 Killers  
621. One-Armed Swordsmen  
622. One Foot Crane (Blake Matthews)  
623. One-Legged Fiend (ShawAngela)  
624. Opium and the Kung Fu Master (Wasted Life)  
625. Out of Danger (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
626. Pai Yu Ching (ShawAngela)  
627. Paris Killers  
628. Payment in Blood (ShawAngela)  
629. Pearl in Command (ShawAngela)  
630. Peculiar Boxing Tricks and the Master (Wasted Life)  
631. Phantom Kung Fu (Shaolin Chamber)  
632. Phantom Lute (ShawAngela)  
633. Pier (Blake Matthews)  
634. Pirate  
635. Point the Finger of Death (Keith Allison)  
636. Police Force (Wasted Life)  
637. Postman Strikes Back  
638. Pretended Rebel  
639. Princess Fragrance (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
640. Prodigal Boxer  
641. Prodigal Son (Master of One Inch Punch)  
642. Professional Killer (ShawAngela)  
643. Protectors  
644. Proud Horse in Flying Sand (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
645. Proud Twins  
646. Purple Darts (ShawAngela)  
647. Pursuit (Venoms5)  
648. Queen Boxer (ShawAngela)  
649. Queen of Fist  
650. Queen's Ransom  
651. Rage of the Wind  
652. Raging Master's Tiger Crane  
653. Raiders of the Shaolin Temple  
654. Raiders of Yunkang Caves (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
655. Rattling Whip (ShawAngela)  
656. Raw Courage (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
657. Rebel of Shaolin  
658. Rebellious Reign  
659. Red Phoenix (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)  
660. Redress (ShawAngela)  
661. Renegade Master  
662. Rescue (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
663. Return of Bruce  
664. Return of Shanghai Joe (Keith Allison)  
665. Return of the Chinese Boxer  
666. Return of the Deadly Blade  
667. Return of the 18 Bronzemen (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
668. Return of the Hero of the Waterfront (ShawAngela)  
669. Return of the Kung Fu Dragon  
670. Return of the One-Armed Swordsman  
671. Return of the Red Tiger  
672. Return of the Tiger  
673. Return Single-Legged Man  
674. Revenge is Sweet (ShawAngela)  
675. Revenge of the Drunken Master  
676. Revenge of the Iron Fist Maiden  
677. Revenge of the Kung Fu Mao (Alex in Wonderland)  
678. Revenge of the Lady Fighter (ShawAngela)  
679. Revenge of the Shaolin Kid  
680. Revenge of the Shaolin Master

681. Revengeful Swordsman  
682. Revenge Superlady  
683. Revenger  
684. Rider of Revenge  
685. Righteous Fist (ShawAngela)  
686. Rikisha Kuri  
687. Ring of Death  
688. Ringing Sword (ShawAngela)  
689. Rivals of Kung Fu  
690. Rivals of the Silver Fox  
691. River of Fury  
692. Robin Hood, Arrows, Beans and Karate (Blake Matthews)  
693. Romance of Book & Sword (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
694. Royal Fist (ShawAngela)  
695. Ruthless Revenge  
696. Savage Five  
697. Saviour Monk (Blake Matthews)  
698. Scholar Swordsman (ShawAngela)  
699. Scorching Sun, Fierce Winds, Wild Fire (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
700. Screaming Tiger  
701. Sea God and Ghosts (ShawAngela)  
702. Seaman No. 7  
703. Secret Executioners  
704. Secret Ninja, Roaring Tiger  
705. Secret of Chinese Kung Fu  
706. Secret of Shaolin Poles (Blake Matthews)  
707. Secret Rivals (Yves Gendron)  
708. Secret Rivals 2  
709. Secret Rivals 3  
710. Secret Service of the Imperial Court (Tex Killer)  
711. Secret Shaolin Kung Fu  
712. 7 Commandments of Kung Fu (So Good Reviews)  
713. 7 Finger Kung Fu (Wasted Life)  
714. 7 Grandmasters (CrazyFrog)  
715. 7-Man Army  
716. Seven Men of Kung Fu  
717. 7-Star Grand Mantis  
718. Seven Steps of Kung Fu  
719. Seven to One (Blake Matthews)  
720. Shadow Boxer  
721. Shadow Ninja  
722. Shadow Whip (PaiMeiFist)  
723. Shanghai Lil and the Sunluck Kid (Blake Matthews)  
724. Shaolin Avengers  
725. Shaolin Boxers  
726. Shaolin Brothers  
727. Shaolin Chastity Kung Fu  
728. Shaolin Daredevils (Wasted Life)  
729. Shaolin Deadly Kicks (Shaolin Chamber)  
730. Shaolin Devil, Shaolin Angel (Nathan Shumate)  
731. Shaolin Disciple  
732. Shaolin Dolemite  
733. Shaolin Drunk Fighter (Blake Matthews)  
734. Shaolin Drunk Monk (Blake Matthews)  
735. Shaolin Ex Monk  
736. Shaolin Handlock (Wasted Life)  
737. Shaolin Hero  
738. Shaolin Intruders  
739. Shaolin Invincible Guys  
740. Shaolin Invincible Sticks (Blake Matthews)  
741. Shaolin Invincibles  
742. Shaolin Iron Claws (Wasted Life)

743. Shaolin Kids  
744. Shaolin King Boxer  
745. Shaolin Kung Fu  
746. Shaolin Kung Fu Master  
747. Shaolin Kung Fu Mystagogue (Nathan Shumate)  
748. Shaolin Legend  
749. Shaolin Mantis (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)  
750. Shaolin Martial Arts (Secret Executioner)  
751. Shaolin Plot  
752. Shaolin Prince  
753. Shaolin Red Master (Shaolin Chamber)  
754. Shaolin Swallow (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)  
755. Shaolin Temple (1976) (Keith Allison)  
756. Shaolin Temple (1976)  
757. Shaolin Temple (1982)  
758. Shaolin Temple 2: Kids from Shaolin  
759. Shaolin Temple Against Lama (Blake Matthews)  
760. Shaolin Temple Strikes Back  
761. Shaolin: The Blood Mission (Shaolin Chamber)  
762. Shaolin vs. Lama (Shaolin Chamber)  
763. Shaolin vs. Ninja  
764. Shaolin vs. Tai Chi  
765. Shaolin Wooden Men  
766. She'd Hate Rather Than Love  
767. Showdown at Cotton Mill  
768. Showdown at the Equator (Blake Matthews)  
769. Silver Maid  
770. Silver Knife, Scarlet Blade  
771. Six Assassins  
772. Six Directions Boxing  
773. Six Intellectuals (ShawAngela)  
774. Skyhawk  
775. Sleeping Fist (Master of One Inch Punch)  
776. Slice of Death  
777. Smugglers  
778. Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin (Blake Matthews)  
779. Snake-Crane Secret (PaiMeiFist)  
780. Snake Deadly Act  
781. Snake in the Eagle's Shadow  
782. Snake in the Monkey's Shadow  
783. Snake Prince  
784. Snake Shadow Lama Fist  
785. Snake Strikes Back  
786. Snaky Fight Against Mantis  
787. Son of the Swordsman  
788. Souls of the Sword  
789. South Shaolin Master  
790. South Shaolin vs. North Shaolin (Blake Matthews)  
791. Spiritual Boxer (DragonClaws)  
792. Spiritual Boxer 2 (PaiMeiFist)  
793. Spiritual Kung Fu (Blake Matthews)  
794. Spy in the Palace  
795. Star, the Rogue and the Kung Fu Kid (Blake Matthews)  
796. Stoner (Scott Blasingame)  
797. Stormy Sun  
798. Story in the Temple of Red Lily (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
799. Story of 36 Killers  
800. Story of the Dragon (Blake Matthews)  
801. Story of the Drunken Master (Blake Matthews)  
802. Story of Thirty-Six Killers (ShawAngela)  
803. Story of Wong Fei-Hung: Part One (Master of One Inch Punch)  
804. Stranger and the Gunfighter (Keith Allison)

805. Stranger from Canton  
806. Stranger from Shaolin  
807. Strife for Mastery  
808. Struggle Karate (Blake Matthews)  
809. Struggle through Death  
810. Sun Dragon (Blake Matthews)  
811. Sunset in the Forbidden City (Blake Matthews)  
812. Super Dragon (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)  
813. Super Gang (DragonClaws)  
814. Super Power  
815. Supergirl of Kung Fu  
816. Supermen Against the Orient  
817. Superior Darter  
818. Supreme Sword  
819. Survival of a Dragon  
820. Swift Shaolin Boxer (Blake Matthews)  
821. Sword (1971)  
822. Sword (1980)  
823. Sword Named Revenge  
824. Sword of Justice  
825. Sword Stained with Royal Blood (Blake Matthews)  
826. Swordsman of all Swordsmen  
827. Swordsmates  
828. Sworn Chivalries (ShawAngela)  
829. Tai Chi Chun (Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)  
830. Taoism Drunkard  
831. Taste of Cold Steel (Venoms5)  
832. Tattoo Connection (Blake Matthews)  
833. Tattooed Dragon (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
834. Temptation  
835. Ten Brothers of Shaolin  
836. 10 Magnificent Killers (northern b)  
837. Ten Tigers of Kwantung (Killer Meteor)  
838. Ten Tigers of Shaolin  
839. That Fiery Girl (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
840. 13 Styles Strike  
841. 36<sup>th</sup> Chamber of Shaolin (Morgoth Bauglir)  
842. 36 Crazy Fists  
843. 36 Deadly Styles  
844. Thirty-Six Sword Guards (ShawAngela)  
845. 37 Plots of Kung Fu (Blake Matthews)  
846. Thou Shalt Not Kill...But Once  
847. Thousand Mile Escort  
848. Three Evil Masters (Morgoth Bauglir)  
849. Three Famous Constables (Wasted Life)  
850. Thunderbolt  
851. Thunderbolt Fist  
852. Thundering Mantis (KenHashibe)  
853. Thundering Sword (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
854. Tiger and Crane Fists (Blake Matthews)  
855. Tiger at Top  
856. Tiger Force  
857. Tiger from Hong Kong (ShawAngela)  
858. Tiger Jungle  
859. Tiger Love  
860. Tiger of Northland  
861. Tiger on the River Kwai (Blake Matthews)  
862. Tiger Over Wall (Master of One Inch Punch)  
863. Tiger Tiger Tiger (Blake Matthews)  
864. Tiger vs Dragon (DragonClaws)  
865. Tigress is Coming (ShawAngela)  
866. Tigresses (FLK Cinema – pollypolly)

867. To Crack the Dragon Gate (ShawAngela)  
868. To Kill a Jaguar (AgriWuxia)  
869. To Kill a Mastermind (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)  
870. To Kill with Intrigue (PaiMeiFist)  
871. Tornado of Pearl River (Blake Matthews)  
872. Touch of Zen (DragonClaws)  
873. Tormentor (ShawAngela)  
874. Toughest Guy (ShawAngela)  
875. Tournament (Master of One Inch Punch)  
876. Triumph of Two Kung Fu Arts  
877. Trail of the Broken Blade (ShawAngela)  
878. Traitorous  
879. Treasure of Bruce Le (Brucesploitation – William)  
880. Triangular Duel (So Good Reviews)  
881. Trilogy of Swordsmanship (Tex Killer)  
882. True Game of Death (Killer Meteor)  
883. Trust and Brotherhood (ShawAngela)  
884. Twelve Deadly Coins (Tex Killer)  
885. Two Cavaliers (So Good Reviews)  
886. Two Champions of Shaolin (Killer Meteor)  
887. Two Crippled Heroes (So Good Reviews)  
888. Two Fists Against the Law (Blake Matthews)  
889. Two Great Cavaliers (Scott Blasingame)  
890. Two Heroes Shooting Stars (Wasted Life)  
891. Two Toothless Tigers (So Good Reviews)  
892. Two Wondrous Tigers (Wasted Life)  
893. Unbeaten 28 (DragonClaws)  
894. Undefeated Sword (ShawAngela)  
895. Valiant Ones (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
896. Valley of the Double Dragon (ShaolinEvil)  
897. Vengeance (DragonClaws)  
898. Vengeance is a Golden Blade (Venoms5)  
899. Vengeance of a Snow Girl (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
900. Vengeful Beauty (Wasted Life)  
901. Victim (DragonClaws)  
902. Wandering Dragon (IMDB – ckormos1)  
903. War of Shaolin Temple (Wasted Life)  
904. Warrior from Shaolin (Keith Allison)  
905. Warriors Two (The Moose)  
906. Water Margin (Lady Jin Szu-Yi)  
907. Way of the Dragon (Keith Allison)  
908. Ways of Kung Fu (HKMDB – Gaijin84)  
909. We Are Going to Eat You (Paul Bramhall)  
910. Web of Death (Wasted Life)  
911. When Tae Kwon Do Strikes (Master of One Inch Punch)  
912. Whiplash (View from the Brooklyn Bridge)  
913. White Butterfly Killer (Teako170)  
914. Wild Panther (Blake Matthews)  
915. Win Them All (Blake Matthews)  
916. Winged Tiger (Venoms5)  
917. Witch Sword (ShawAngela)  
918. Wolf Devil Woman (Blake Matthews)  
919. Woman Avenger (Blake Matthews)  
920. Writing Kung Fu (DragonClaws)  
921. Yellow-Faced Tiger (mpm74)  
922. Yoga and the Kung Fu Girl (Keith Allison)  
923. Young Avenger (Wasted Life)  
924. Young Dragons (Master of One Inch Punch)  
925. Young Hero (IMDB – ckormos1)  
926. Young Hero of Shaolin (1975) (Blake Matthews)  
927. Young Hero of Shaolin (1984) (Keith Allison)  
928. Young Hero of Shaolin, Part 2 (Blake Matthews)

- 929. Young Master (Master of One Inch Punch)
- 930. Young Taoism Fighter (Blake Matthews)
- 931. Young Vagabond (Venoms5)
- 932. Zen Kwan Do Strikes in Paris (Wasted Life)
- 933. Zen Master 6 (Blake Matthews)
- 934. Zodiac Fighters (IMDB – Leofwine\_draca)